S C R I A B I N I N C O N T E X T

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of another higher degree at another University and to the best of the writer's knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person except when due reference is made.

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PREFACE

The purpose of this research project is to present a background to the composer Alexander Scriabin and his compositions. His life and works have been well documented although less has been written on the forces which affected his life and compositions. It is the writer's opinion that a purely technical dissection of his scores or a chronological recording of the events of his life will not shed much light on the music itself. The Diaries reveal a great deal of the man and his sometimes complicated philosophies as do the numerous letters which have survived him. What a tragedy that his playing was not recorded acoustically as by 1915 the technological facility to do so was of a high order. Our reliance on the many ambiguous accounts of his playing by those that heard him could then be gratefully 'cast into the hedge'.

In this document Scriabin emerges as a child of the nineteenth century and a pathfinder to modernism in the twentieth century. His music begins in the chromatic melodic tradition of Chopin and ends at the brink of atonality.

The origins of the bitter acrimony between the Russian Nationalist composers, predominantly the Big Five and the pro-Western or Eurasian composers, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, are traced back to the time of Peter the Great. Parallels are suggested in the field of fine art with the World of Art looking to the West for inspiration and the group known as the Wanderers looking to Russian folklore and history

for their roots.

The reforming zeal with which the composer strove to convert those around him has done much to hinder an appreciation of the music itself. The lucidity of his compositions contrasts sharply with the convolutions of his mystical theosophy with which he became progressively more obsessed. Interest in the supernatural and strange nervous afflictions were common amongst wealthy Russians at the turn of the century and it is against this background that Scriabin's mysticism and symbolism are identified in this document.

Discussion of his works attempts to trace the transient musical influences of other composers such as Chopin, Wagner and Liszt. His detractors called his piano compositions parodies of Chopin. It is submitted that they resemble his Polish idol far less than, for example, early Beethoven resembles Haydn. In the end, I feel, Scriabin's music must stand as a unique testament to an extraordinary man.

INTRODUCTION

When Dostoevsky wrote of God and the devil being at war , he accurately portrayed the political climate into which Scriabin was born and which culminated in the Revolution of 1915. Indeed all over Europe the approach of the new century was marked by a period of rapid social and political change, scientific invention and economic expansion.

Industrialisation began late in Russia but as contact with the West increased, the effects became more pronounced. In particular, the expansion of the Russian railways led to the opening up of previously closed markets and encouraged a flow of new ideas to these isolated regions. With these economic changes came a gradual spiritual decline, evidenced by and partly stimulated by the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859 and the Descent of Man in 1871. Combined with the materialist cult and an axiom of rational understanding, the apparent omnipotence of Christianity throughout Europe was greatly reduced. Socially the ramifications of Christianity would continue but atheism became a fixture in an ever changing world. This spiritual weakening in the latter part of the nineteenth century gave way in the twentieth century to mechanisation, materialism and automation - the New God. Warnings from Nietzsche and Dostoevsky went unheard.[1]

During this period there was population expansion of unprecedented proportions. In Russia the population doubled in less than fifty years. Nowhere in Europe was growth so rapid. Over the same period

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1. John Jones, - Dostoevsky (London: O.U.P., 1983)

Germany's population increase was 72%, the United Kingdom's 54% and France's a mere 10%.[1] Coupled with this population increase was the fact that very little of the foreign wealth pouring into the country found its way into the hands of the proletariat, whose conditions since liberation had scarcely changed. A relatively small percentage of the workforce was employed in industry, the rest remaining on the land in overcrowded living conditions. Neither the position of the farm labourer nor that of the factory worker was improved when foreign lending to Russia was cut off during the Boxer Rebellion and the Spanish-American war freezing investment and restricting development. The country's heavy dependence on foreign financial support is evidenced by Vitte's grand railway scheme, a programme which Russia could not afford. More than half of the total foreign debt of 1890 was caused by interest payments on the railway project and as a consequence of this, industrial expansion ceased and workers were either laid off or forced to accept reduced wages.[2] In addition the government already short of revenue dramatically increased the burdensome taxes thus precipitating the riots of 1901-1902. The authorities remained indifferent to the miserable circumstances in which the peasants existed and clearly sought to perpetuate the order as it then was. There were, however, people who were acutely aware of the inequity of the situation and who believed that social reform was essential. Writers, painters and musicians began to feel a responsibility for their fellow countrymen and this social consciousness became apparent in their work. Painters used political subjects and allegory was common. The world of fantasy became a frequent means of escape from the obligations of social criticism.

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1. p21 Lional Kochan, Russia in Revolution (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967)

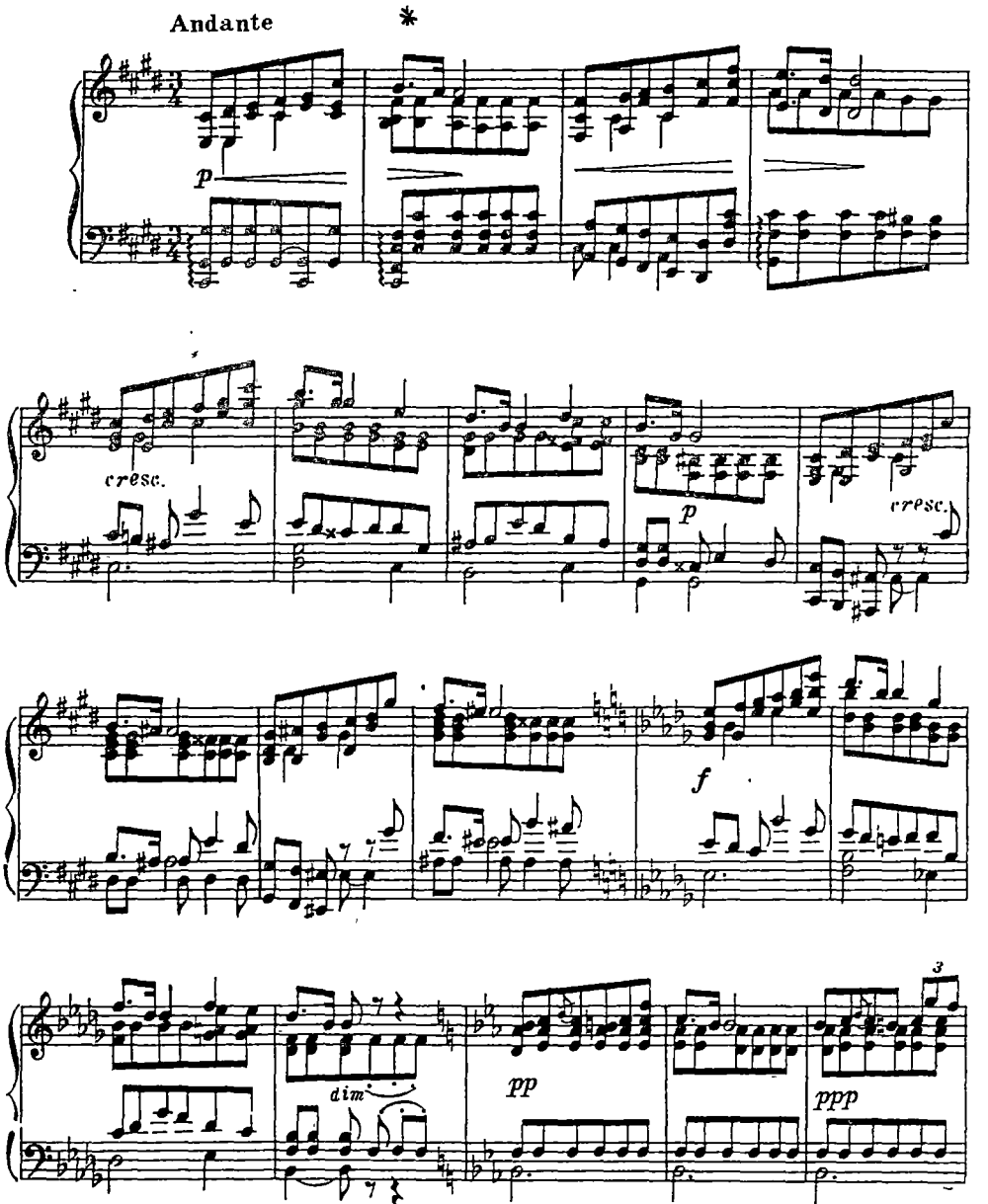
2. p39 ibid.

Artists began to move away from the two fundamental principles of nineteenth century aesthetics, form and emotional expression, in search of intenser means of communication. James Joyce, at the forefront of the literary movement, published Ulysses marking a departure from the tradition of rigid chronology. Kafka, in his novel The Castle reflected a similar fusion of fantasy and reality with distorted time sequences. Writing attained a sensation of timelessness where reality and dream intermingled. The same was true of music with Satie through the static, hypnotic and non-progressive effects of his harmonies. Wagner incorporated prose with music creating a Music Drama while Scriabin introduced a music symbolism to his scores.

The most obvious change that occurred in music was the replacement of the tonal system used for centuries by a new harmonic language. The movement away from tonality was the greatest obsession of nineteenth century musicians. Tonality had been the central organising force of a piece. John Field, Chopin and Liszt weakened tonality through thicker chromaticism. The increasing chromaticism and harmonic dissonance led to a vagueness of key and eventually the abolition of tonality altogether. Scriabin, Prokofiev and Hindemith extended the limits of chromaticism, achieving in the end non-tonal music. In some ways they parallel Schoenberg's harmonic development although it was his second string quartet 1907-1908 which marked the turning point away from tonality.

Debussy and Hugo Wolf also wrote pieces where the tonic chord does not appear until the last bar. Debussy in particular used fluid harmonies

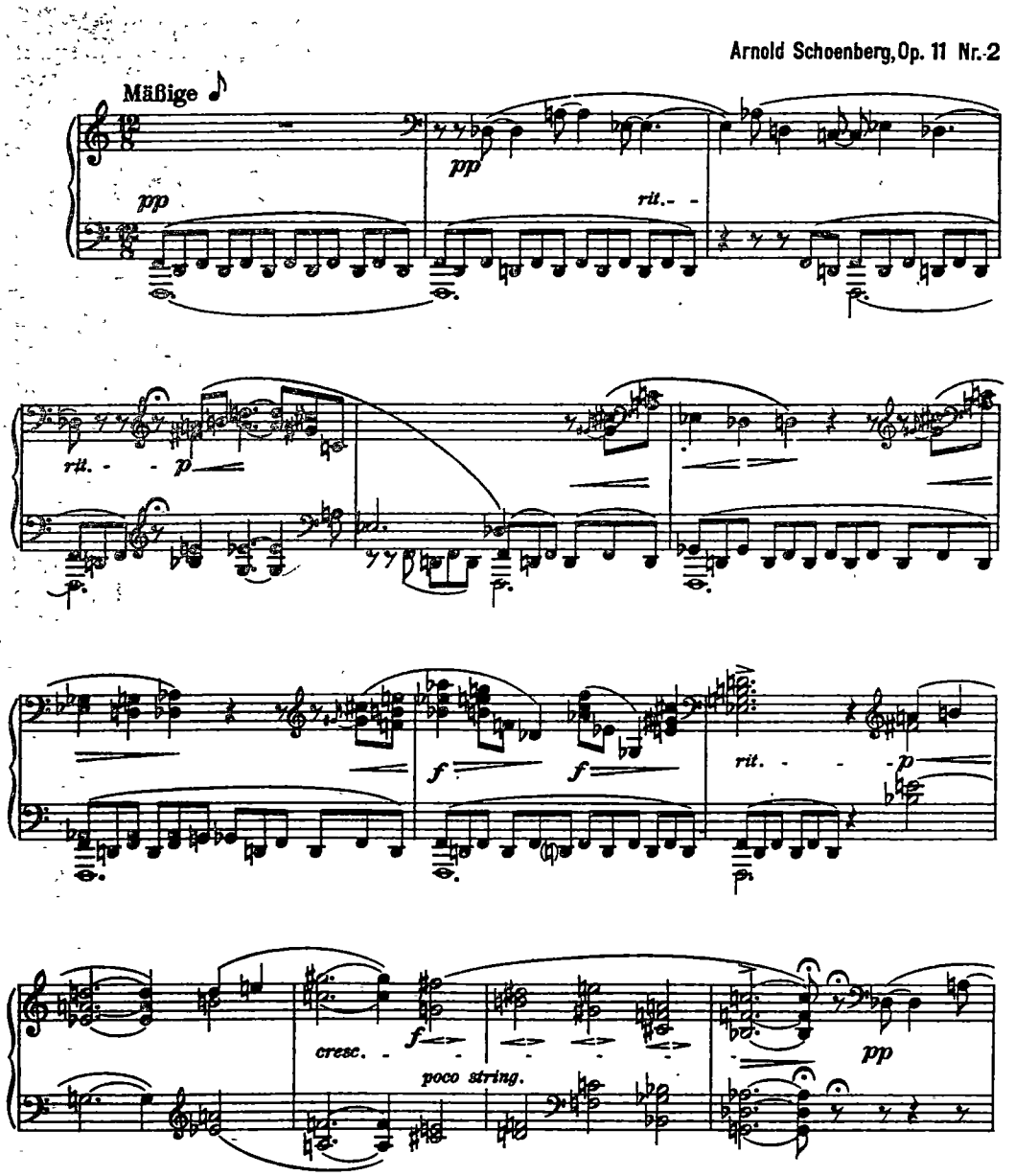
in an attempt to break with the rigidity of functional harmony. Other devices commonly used by composers to weaken tonal harmony were the flattened seventh, whole tone and pentatonic scales, parallel progression of chords and static harmony by means of ostinato and pedal point.



*The year of composition given here is based on the chronological list of juvenilia drawn up by Scriabin himself in 1889

Scriabin: Etude Op2 No.1

Use of the flattened seventh.



Schoenberg: Three Pieces for Piano Op11

Use of ostinato to create static harmony.

Harmony alone was not the only victim of assault. The formal construction of music was reorganised. Traditional sonata form was greatly modified and sometimes even dispensed with as was the idea of returning to the tonic for the recapitulation.

The increasing vagueness of form and harmony led to shimmering suggestiveness rather than bold outright statement. Debussy's plastic forms revolutionised formal compositional concepts as did his harmonic language through its fusion of modality, pentatonicism and Javanese scales. This last borrowing from the East was to become common practice amongst late nineteenth century composers. Its effect was to loosen the sense of key while never creating the audible angularity of Schoenberg's non-tonal and twelve tone compositions. It was this developing of a personal harmonic language reflecting the new age which was the crucial problem facing composers at the turn of the century. Scriabin responded by developing his own tonality based on one chord.

The Impressionist school in music developed some years after the Impressionist movement of the painters. It was characterised by a lack of emotional drive and completely avoided any suggestion of rhetoric. Debussy poured scorn on the teutonic method of theme and development. He felt the unseen evocations of music should be the basis of a composition. He claimed that the secret of composition lay in "the sound of the sea, the outline of a horizon, the wind in the leaves, the cry of a bird". However he despised mere imitation and singled out Beethoven's "wooden nightingale and Swiss cuckoo-clock cuckoo" in the Pastoral Symphony.

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1. p173 Arthur B. Wenk, Claude Debussy and Twentieth Century Music (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1983)
2. p178 ibid.
3. p184 ibid.

Russian Impressionism, however, was far more romantic and emotional, possibly because it derived from the Germans, where the human element was so fundamental to art. Scriabin's music is far more emotional than that of Debussy even though their respective evolutions were so similar. Neither had a specific link with a continuous musical tradition, unlike the Second Viennese School, Hindemith and Reger who so self-consciouslessly displayed their derivativeness from J.S. Bach. Debussy and Scriabin were both influenced by a wide variety of musical styles although each showed a distinct departure from the conventions of his contemporaries.

A more direct evolution from Austro-German Romanticism was Expressionism which held that the emotions of the artist were to be portrayed as intensely as possible. This is in direct contrast to Impressionism where the artist remained remote behind his re-created image. Donald Mitchell describes Expressionism as essentially the art of release whereas Impressionism is subdued suppression.[1] The latter is usually typified by reticent dynamics, sparing dissonances and harmonic ambiguity. Expressionism is most often born out of the necessity to express an intensely felt emotion. 'Heavy and Dense' are words used frequently to describe its intensities of dissonance and dynamic extremes. The inspiration for expressionistic music is frequently the grotesque and the nightmarish, springing from the heart rather than the intellect. Schoenberg, the musician most closely associated with the movement wrote, "One must be convinced of the infallibility of one's own fantasy and one must believe in one's own inspiration".[2] Schoenberg also closely mirrors the trend towards abstraction in the fine arts and

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1. p141 Donal Mitchell, The Language of Modern Music (London: Faber & Faber, 1963)
2. p168 Leonard Stein, Style and Idea. Selected writings of A. Schoenberg (London: Faber & Faber, 1975)

'illogicality' in literature in his music. Schoenberg was composing non-tonal music at the same time Kandinsky was painting his early abstracts 1908-1912. While painters did away with visual 'objects' writers dispensed with logical revelation.

To convey illogicality in music was more difficult although in the late nineteenth century composers had, with increasing skill, been able to reproduce the state of the mind in musical terms. Berlioz' Symphony Fantastique and Tchaikovsky's opera, The Queen of Spades create what Mitchell calls "a condition of hallucination". Wagner's 'mad' Tristan in Act III, Strauss' Salome and Schoenberg's Erwartung all exploit the subconscious.

Ideologically Scriabin fits into all groups remarkably well. He embraced wholeheartedly the expressionists' enthusiasm for combining philosophy with music and his music is, if anything, more emotional than Schoenberg's. However, his shifting harmonies and in particular his use of unresolved sevenths, ninths and elevenths, closely parallel the harmonies of Debussy. His harmony is always sensual and contrasts strongly with the angularities of expressionism. However, in conveying abstraction, Scriabin must be the master. His ecstatic and self-consuming study of Op 8 No.12 or the morbidly introspective ninth sonata are surely unsurpassed in revealing the darker regions of the mind.

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1. p70 Donald Mitchell

These then were some of the developments taking place during Scriabin's life. Regarded as both cosmopolitan and Slavophile he subscribed in part to elements of each of their ideologies but in the end was in a unique category of his own.

RUSSIA

Prior to 1800, Russian secular music was almost non-existent. There was a similar absence of expression in the field of fine art. In almost every sphere, be it political reform or the industrialisation of factories, Russia lagged behind the rest of Europe. The speed with which the country had to make up lost time would explain the chaos which resulted at the beginning of the twentieth century.

As a result of the autocratic rule of the Tsars and the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian populace suffered a suppression unparalleled in Europe. Censorship was severe and secular music was forbidden. We read of the Orthodox Patriarch ordering wagonloads of musical instruments to be burnt in 1649.[1]

Peter the Great's sudden modernisation brought about the most far reaching changes, arguably even the Revolution. He imported foreign musicians, foreign painters and architects and had St. Petersburg built along the lines of a Western European city. French and German were spoken by the gentry and there was even a permanent French theatre in St. Petersburg. Russian was spoken only by the serfs. Most of Tchaikovsky's songs were written in German and his operas in French. Scriabin's musical titles were likewise penned in French. The tradition of Russian thinkers standing with one foot in Europe and the other across the Urals was firmly set. All artistic and cultural thought

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1. p47 Faubian Bowers The New Scriabin, Enigma and Answers (London: David and Charles Newton Abbot, 1973)

was based upon this dichotomy. The Slavophiles or Nationalists, including the Big Five, reacted against Europe. The Eurasians, Tchaikovsky, Scriabin and Rachmaninoff, reacted against what they thought provincial. An illustration of this difference would be the depiction of Pushkin's heroine Tatyana as old-fashioned and provincial whereas Tchaikovsky's Eugene is a fashionable, Western Byronist.

There was much traffic between St. Petersburg and Germany and France.[1] The tradition of an educated class studying and travelling abroad continued until the second world war. The word 'intelligentsia' was a Russian invention for a new liberal class, somewhere between the serfs and the government. Their position was contradictory in that they on the one hand sought to uplift the peasants but on the other had a vested interest in the social order remaining as it was. They were patriotic and nationalistic but their education was foreign. They had an emotional attachment to the peasant - Man the noble savage - but more closely resembled the aristocracy which was responsible for his suppression.

Young Russians were generally sent to Germany to study. It was thought that contact with France, so recently in revolution, would instil socialist ideals in returning students which would undermine the old order of Russia. However, there was generally a greater adulation of French thought in Germany than there was in France itself. Germany had not undergone a socialist revolution and many intellectuals and teachers looked to Paris for a model of the new order.

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1. p35 Lionel Kochan, Russia in Revolution (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967)

Sir Isaiah Berlin divides all artists into two groups, French and Russian.[1] The French believed in producing as good a piece of art as was possible. The Russians believed the artist himself was inseparable from his work. Tolstoi, Dostoevsky and to an even greater extent, Scriabin, believed themselves to be high priests of their art. Even the Russian symbolists felt themselves to be under a moral obligation to write what was pure and truthful. Perhaps this reflects their more spiritual soul.

Russian aestheticism was imported from Germany but to it was added a religious fervour, possibly to compensate for the dying Christianity. Russian thinkers were indebted to the German Metaphysicians who tried to explain the essence of life and thought through non-scientific means. One needed psychological insight in order to perceive the inner or essential qualities of a person or society. The Metaphysicians also believed their art would build a new cosmological system and that a new form of life would be revealed which would transform society. As far back as 1830 the Russian philosopher Nicholas Stankevich was teaching that the only truth came from the purveyors of knowledge - philosophers and poets (in particular Kant, Shakespeare and Goethe) - and that the study of these men would reveal glimpses of the perfect order to come.[2] The barbarity of the government, the hypocrisy of the clergy and the destitution of the serfs were all superfluities, as they were concerned with the physical world. It was a convenient belief as social reformers were rigorously persecuted. This 'exulted intellectualism' was aptly satirised by Herzen - "A man who went for a walk in Sokolniki (a suburb of Moscow) went there not just for a walk but in order to surrender

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1. p30 Isaiah Berlin, Russian Thinkers (Dover Pub., N.Y. 1968)

2. p41 ibid.

himself to the pantheistic feeling of his identification with the cosmos."[1]

The Populists used social justice and equality as their battle cry. They approached reform with religious zeal in the face of government persecution. They sympathised with the agrarian proletariat and perceived them as martyrs.

The Big Five and Fine Art

A truly Russian school of art and music began with the painter Alexander Ivanov 1806-1858 and the composer Mikhail Glinka 1804-1857. He is regarded as the father of Russian music. To this day his patriotic opera Ivan Susanin composed in 1836 opens the season at the Bolshoi. Its story concerns a peasant hero who sacrifices his life preventing a Polish invasion. In the same year the Inspector General written by the father of Russian literature, Gogol, was produced.[2]

Opera was the single most important secular musical form until the beginning of the twentieth century. It grew out of vaudeville, a legacy of Peter the Great. He imported foreign music and musicians for the use of the court who brought with them predominantly dance music. Dance forms to this day play an important role in Russian music.

Western symphonic music was heard. Peter the Great began the tradition of importing Western culture and many European musicians toured or

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1. p132 Iśaiah Berlin

2. p188 David Mitchell The Language of Modern Music, Faber & Faber, London, 1963

actually resided in Russia. Wagner toured extensively and astounded the public by conducting with his back to the audience. Liszt gave his final recital in Kiev and the Schumanns and Berlioz gave performances to Russian audiences. Debussy and Richard Strauss toured as conductors of their own music. John Field whose piano style was so strong an influence on first Chopin and then the young Scriabin, taught for forty years in Moscow. Busoni, too, taught at the Moscow Conservatoire.

The group of composers known as the Big Five - Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Cui, Mussorgsky and Balakirev, strove to create a Russian school of music devoid of eclecticism and in the tradition of Glinka. This was a reaction against the 'Eurasian' influence of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire under Anton Rubinstein and against the Jewish dominance of the teaching staff. It is an anomaly that St. Petersburg, the most European of Russian cities, should attract a nationalist school and Moscow, more provincial and 'Russian', the Internationalists. The Big Five's ambition to serve the ordinary people had much in common with the group of painters known as the Wanderers who left the St. Petersburg Academy in 1863 in protest at the eclectic approach of the School.[1] They wanted to take art to the people and believed that art essentially should be useful, thus opposing strongly the dictum "art for art's sake". Belonging to the Intelligentsia they voiced their political fears through their painting. Fedotov's Monastic Refectory depicts monks and clergy gorging themselves in a ludicrous manner. Repin's painting They Did Not Expect him shows a political exile returning from Siberia. The Wanderers followed the writers in moving away from

1. Camilla Grey, The Russian Experiment in Art (London: Thomas and Hudson, 1962)

Romanticism to express concern for the real world of poverty and hunger.

The Crimean War had a polarising effect on Russian artists. The Slavophiles became even further estranged from the Eurasians. The Five aimed to create a musical language based on the traditions of folk tunes, Church music and folklore. They were against the traditionalists and in particular the German School. They admired the free forms of the Romantics, Berlioz, Chopin and Liszt. Mussorgsky's songs, with their clashing harmonies, abrupt modulations and frequent avoidance of final cadences typify the aspirations of the group. Moscow, more isolated and 'Russian' produced the Eurasian or Universalists - Tchaikovsky, Arensky, Gliere, Rachmaninoff and Scriabin. While their music is unmistakably Russian, it follows traditional Western forms far more closely than that of the Slavophiles.

Undoubtedly the fact that none of the Five were professionally trained musicians affected their approach to professional music and musicians. Music was still viewed as proletarian and as a profession was looked down upon. Most of the Russian composers came from wealthy backgrounds where music was a pastime practised by amateurs. Mussorgsky worked for the communications ministry, Cui was a general, Borodin was a chemist of wide repute, Rimsky-Korsakov was a naval officer and Balakirev alone, lived from music. He acted as mentor to the group.

The group of painters comprising the Wanderers was brought together by the railway tycoon Mamontov. He, and others like him, removed the

patronage of the arts from the sole domain of the Tsar. He loved music and fine art passionately and the colony he founded on his estate at Abramtsevo was really the beginning of the modern art movement. There they re-discovered Novgorod architecture and restored icons to their former splendour. The colony built a church copied from early mediaeval architecture, carving the wood, laying mosaics, painting icons and weaving tapestries.[1] Shortly after they established a craft centre on the Mamontov estate and craftsmen and artists went there to study pottery and other lost arts. The Abramtsevo Colony had a profound effect on the development of art and the performing arts, giving fresh impetus to the folk culture and primitivist movements. The parochial became sufficiently elevated to be incorporated into cosmopolitan art, folk melody was dignified by acceptance into 'serious' music. In literature Tolstoi and Dostoevsky ennobled the serf.

The Primitivist School tried to create an art form based on the earliest recollections of pagan man. Constant Lambert described it as "a modern craving for the dark and instinctive by the super sophisticated."[2] The paintings of Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova best exemplify the movement. The alliance of craft and art created at Abramtsevo an artistic homogeneity which was unique. Mamontov instituted Sunday play readings where artists from all disciplines took part. These grew into full scale opera productions where they performed, acted, painted backdrops and made props. A large part of Diaghilev's later success was due to the complete integration of his productions, in particular the importance of the scenery for the first time painted

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1. Tamara Talbot Rice, A Concise History of Russian Art (London: Thames and Hudson, 1963)

2. p44 Constant Lambert

by prominent artists. This was all a legacy of Abramtsevo. The Snow Maiden by Rimsky-Korsakov was the first production of Mamontov's private opera. The designs were by Vasnetsov.[1] Korovin, Golovin and Levitan were to continue this tradition of painting for the performing arts. Audiences were stunned by these innovative and daring designs which formed such an important part of the action.

The idea of an all-encompassing art led to the movement known as The World of Art. It paralleled closely European Art Nouveau. The painter Benois describes the movement as one "which tries to influence society and to inspire in it a desirable attitude to art - art understood in its broadest sense, that is to say including literature and music."[2] In other words, "art for art's sake".

In the last decade of the nineteenth century German Symbolism influenced a number of Russian painters. It was a form of "intellectual romanticism" for a section of society "drowning in its own sophistication."[3] Larionov and Petrov-Vodkin were the first to emulate it and the early Chagall paintings show its influence quite strongly. The Symbolists were essentially decadents and the Russian symbolists the most decadent of all. The absinth drinking world of Verlaine, the Marquis de Sade, Aubrey Beardsley, Baudelaire and E.A. Poe was strangely in harmony with the dark and mystical gloom of the Russians. Mental illness was the rule rather than the exception and even the moralistic Tolstoi reputedly drank cocktails of Vodka, gunpowder and human blood.[4] Almost all the Russian composers were strangely afflicted. Tchaikovsky

1. Faubion Bowers, Scriabin Volume I (Tokyo, Kodansha Int.Ltd., 1969)
2. p37 Camilla Grey, The Russian Experiement in Art (London: Thomas and Hudson, 1962)
3. p251 ibid.
4. p48 Faubion Bowers, Scriabin Volume 1

suffered severely from bouts of melancholia and often thought his head was falling off while conducting. Arensky died of acute alcoholism, Rimsky-Korsakov suffered mental depression and collapsed regularly with attacks of nerves. Mussorgsky suffered from numerous nervous disorders and died eventually from alcoholism. Rachmaninoff suffered melancholia to a marked degree and dedicated his second piano concerto to his hypnotherapist, Dr. Nikolai Dahl. Liadov suffered debilitating headaches and Balakirev belonged to a secret sect, the Black Hundred which practised black masses and forms of sadism. Scriabin was a profound hypochondriac and suffered from severe nervousness. It is little wonder then that art and music were seen as a form of mystical salvation which would purify the world.

The World of Art organised a number of exhibitions where Russian paintings were displayed side by side with European works of art. The aim was to make Russia a part of Europe, in the tradition of Peter the Great and to educate the Russian public in international taste. Diaghilev also published a magazine called the World of Art and one of the earliest issues discussed Scriabin's compositions.

In 1902 two members of the World of Art founded a society, 'Evenings of Contemporary Music' (Nuvel and Nurok). They organised performances of Debussy, Ravel, Mahler, Strauss as well as Scriabin, Rachmaninoff and Medtner. It was at one of these meetings that Diaghilev met Stravinsky and their famous collaboration began.

As a consequence to such exhibitions organised by the World of Art, public art collecting became very fashionable. Many private galleries were open to the public and Russian artists had the opportunity to study the French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists in a way that the French painters themselves were unable to do. The aim of the World of Art had been fulfilled. Russia, or at least artistic Russia, had become a part of cosmopolitan Europe and in many ways could be said to be the leader in the early years of the twentieth century as evidenced, for example, by the development of abstraction out of cubism, years before its arrival in the West.

SCRIABIN

Scriabin was essentially a musical symbolist. All his life he spattered his works with cryptic letterings and the only point of difference from the Symbolists was in his belief in "life" rather than their insistence on "death and darkness".

His music reflects quite markedly the period in Russia just prior to the revolution. When revolution and war came he embraced the changes whole-heartedly. He was regarded as a Westerner or Cosmopolitan by his contemporaries and his harmonic daring led to his music's frequent rejection. He was possibly the first Russian to compose in a truly universal style and led the way for twentieth century composition, which marked a turning away from individual nationalistic traditions.

Scriabin's aesthetic has frequently been misinterpreted by Soviet officialdom who attribute to it causes such as Marxism. Faubion Bowers describes the Marxist platform by the following slogans: "Being determines consciousness" or "Economics is Destiny".[1] Scriabin's aesthetic would be "Consciousness determines Being". While Scriabin entertained similar ideas to Wagner on social reform through his music, he advocated salvation through metaphysics (rather like Schoenberg). Amongst his friends he was referred to as the Poet of Ecstasy and followed Baudelaire's dictum: "Music excavates hell."[2] To him, the expressive quality of music was all-important.

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1. p108 Faubion Bowers, The New Scriabin, Enigma and Answers (London: David and Charles Newton Abbot, 1973)

2. p148 ibid.

The comparison with Wagner goes further than a common desire to reform the world. Scriabin planned to invent a completely new language and music, which would be performed for all the world in the Himalayas and would have the same intention as the Ring but on a much larger scale. His plans for a mass metaphysical transfiguration were fairly advanced and there is no doubt he was in earnest about the project.[1]

Scriabin made only one attempt at opera. Sections of the work reveal the hero to be the composer, rather like the Heldenleben tone poem of Richard Strauss. Scriabin pictures himself as a philosopher-musician-poet.

"I AM THE MAGICIAN OF A POWERFUL HEAVENLY HARMONY, lavishing caressing dreams on mankind", he sings, "with the POWER OF LOVE I will make life's springtime. I will find long-desired peace BY THE STRENGTH OF MY WISDOM".[2] There are scenes in magical gardens and a grand ball at the palace where the princess wearies of fawning flatterers. Finally the hero wins the princess and leads a people's rebellion releasing all the prisoners jailed by the King. The philosopher-musician-poet and his princess die in each other's arms in ecstatic, culminative bliss: the Act of the Last Attainment" the hero says, "I am the apotheosis of world creation. I am the aim of aims, the end of ends."[3]

In 1903 Scriabin left Russia. He believed the Continent would be more appreciative of his ideas and that he himself would flourish in the unrestricted atmosphere of a foreign country. Europe also lived under a cloak of mysticism and symbolism, due largely to the writings of the

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1. Hugh Macdonald Skryabin (London, O.U.P., 1978)
2. Faubion Bowers, The New Scriabin: Enigma and Answers (London: David and Charles Newton Abbot, 1973)
3. p145 ibid.

French symbolists and in particular Baudelaire and Verlaine. The general state of permissive decadence appeared immensely attractive to the young composer.

Formally Scriabin moved towards miniaturisation. Some of his piano pieces are of seconds duration. He wanted the maximum of expression with the most concise score possible. He saw the "microcosm contained within the macrocosm and vice versa".[1] Hence we find on one hand works of a few lines, and on the other, enormous and grandiose scores for the symphonic works. This predisposition towards extremes typified the latter nineteenth century where the towering magnificence of the large symphonic works counterbalanced the art song and miniatures for the piano.

Scriabin's political leanings became clearer with his friendship for Georgi Plekhaw. He was a staunch Marxist and Socialist and his influence over Scriabin was profound. At one stage he even procured a slogan for the Poem of Ecstasy, "Arise, ye wretched of the earth."[2] Scriabin formulated some ideas of his own on psychoanalysis. He was convinced that if the individual studied the HE, roughly equivalent to the EGO, he would gain complete knowledge of the cosmos. The will of the individual was the ultimate authority, the god. He passionately strove to convert everyone around him and was not entirely without

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1. Faubion Bowers, The New Scriabin: Enigma and Answers
2. p210 ibid.

success. However, the majority of his associates either didn't understand him or thought him mad. He once said, "I don't know anything I can't express at the piano, and from these different expressions I can build an entire system as an inner entirety or whole. And it seems to me that musical expression is much more pointedly logical in its descriptive powers than any abstract concept."[1]

The projected Mysterium, a colossal work to be performed in the Himalayas and which would unite the world, was to synthesise all the arts of sound, colour, sight, lights, touch and scents. The idea of linking the senses, synaesthesia, was not entirely new. Wagner achieved a degree of success with his music dramas and Arthur Bliss developed the idea still further. Bliss even wrote a colour symphony and described the movements as follows:

First movement: Purple: the colour of Amethysts, Pageantry, Royalty and Death.

Second Movement: Red: the colour of Rubies, Wine, Revelry, Furnaces, Courage and Magic.

Third Movement: Blue: the colour of Sapphires, Deep Water, Skies, Loyalty and Melancholy.

Fourth Movement: Green: the colour of Emeralds, Hope, Joy, Youth, Spring and Victory.

Newton first noted the relation of pitch to the colours of the rainbow

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1. p184 Fáubion Bowers, The New Scriabin: Enigma and Answers

and in 1739 Louis Bertrand Castel built an Ocular Harpsichord where each note popped up a different coloured ribbon.[1] This rather crude attempt at uniting the two is rather too inexact to produce the chromatic scale. Rimsky-Korsakov explored the possibilities of a colour organ and it is interesting to compare his conclusions with Scriabin's. In this case colour was associated with key.

Key	Rimsky	Scriabin
C maj	White	Red
G maj	Brownish-gold	Orange-rose
D maj	Yellow-sunny	Yellow-brilliant
A maj	Rosy-clear	Green
E maj	Blue, Sapphire	Bluish-white
B maj	Sombre, dark blue shot with steel	Bluish-white
F# maj	Greyish-green	Bright blue
D^b maj	Dusky, warm	Violet
A^b maj	Greyish-violet	Purple violet
E^b maj	Dark, gloomy bluish-grey	Steel coloured with a metallic lustre...[2]

Key association has been used by all composers. For Beethoven B minor was black and presumably Bach also found this key tragic. Scriabin's favourite key was D# minor which he associated with tragic exultation, the most famous example being the Etude Op.8 No.12. Kandinsky claimed to see colours very clearly when he heard different tone colours, for example:

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1. Terence McLaughlin, Music and Communication (London, Faber & Faber, 1970)

2. p70 ibid.

flute tone	light blue
cello	dark blue
violin	green
trumpet	red
drums	vermilion
horn & bassoon	violet. [1]

While the association of sound and colour is very intriguing, it varies to a large degree from person to person. At times completely non-existent and at others so overpowering so that, from a composer's point of view, it must be regarded as a haphazard by-product. More interesting is the physiological effect music has on the body. A survey in America measured the cardiovascular rate of an audience before and after the performance of various pieces of music. Impressionistic music did not produce much alteration but the March from Tannhäuser achieved a pulse increase from 80 to 84 and a breathing increase from 9.6 to 13.5. The most 'effective' piece of music assessed was the Ride of the Walküre which measured a pulse increase from 68 to 83 and a breathing increase from 9 to 14.0. The effects subside shortly after the performance.

Surprisingly, ballet had very little appeal for Scriabin who was faintly embarrassed by the physicality of its violence. However, as the Mysterium was to unite all the Arts and the Senses, it would by necessity have to include dance movement. Scriabin was greatly impressed by Isadore Duncan's 'free dancing' or movement with symbolic gestures, and

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1. p198 Ortman, Effects of Music

began to conceive of melodies, begun in sound and ending in gesticulation.[1]

Scriabin did actually perform once with an actor - Alisa Koonen, in a presentation of his music as a pantomime.[2] They incorporated symbolic gestures to convey the mood of the music. Simultaneously Scriabin operated a circle of coloured lights.

In addition to studying movement, he immersed himself in the works of Yogi Chavak. He studied Hindu culture and daily practised Yogic breathing exercises. It is possible to trace a parallel with Debussy and the Western Symbolists turning to exotic cultures, particularly Eastern cultures, for inspiration, at the turn of the century.

The first stage of the Mysterium was to be called the Prefactory Action and would include the abovementioned lights, scents, processions and tastes. A large chorus would declaim words of the text and march, robed in a "symphony of flavours, a costumed symphony".[3] They would also contribute whispers and rustling sounds.

Scriabin believed music expressed everything in the cosmos. He noted how the early Indian religious philosophers constructed a language, sphota, to explain their metaphysics. Sphota was a crystallisation of all knowledge, including the Brahman itself, expressed in musical terms. In creating his twentieth century equivalent, he wished to recapture all the magical properties of the early Indian philosopher-composers.

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1. Faubion Bowers, Scriabin Volume II (Tokyo, Kodansha Int.Ltd., 1969)
2. p113 ibid.
3. p175 ibid.

A part of his musical symbolism is more readily understandable. The descending minor ninth represented to him the "descent of spirit into matter",[1] rather as the falling diminished seventh represented the forces of darkness in the Baroque era. A falling semitone represented human sorrow to Scriabin. He uses bell effects in his music to symbolise religious harmony particularly effectively in the sixth sonata. Bells have been associated with religious rites for centuries, particularly in the last, no doubt because their perfect tuning initially represented the Sphota.

The desire to create total ecstasy where the soul is lost, away from the sordidness of the world was a Romantic reaction to the squalor of the Industrial Revolution and the scientific realism of a mechanical age. Strauss' Death and Transfiguration, Schoenberg's Transfigured Night, Debussy's Pelleas and Melisande and of course Prometheus, all embody this spirit.

1. p210 Faubion Bowers, The New Scriabin: Enigma and Answers

WORKS

In common with Beethoven, Scriabin jotted down many of his ideas in various notebooks and musical sketch pads dating back to his early twenties. They provide a fascinating insight into his philosophical growth and provide a clear guide as to what his music meant to him.

The lovely C# minor Etude Op.2 No.1 was written when he was only fifteen and is today still one of his most well-known compositions. The influence of Chopin is clear but the voice is unmistakably his own. The chordal accompaniment, the prominence given to the flattened seventh in the melody, and the general ruminative melancholy that the piece exudes, are typically Russian and Scriabinesque.

Scriabin was a brilliant pianist, particularly as a colourist. He was paid the supreme compliment by Safonoff when he said Scriabin could "make a piano not sound like a piano".[1] All the reviewers of his concerts talk of his flights of fancy, imaginative daring and magical pedal effects causing the harmonies to shimmer and swim. His preoccupation with the seventh was for precisely this reason that its ambiguities could lead it into new waters and avoid the blatancy of diatonic harmony. It has been claimed that this was a borrowing from Chopin but then at that time all composers were obsessed with the possibilities of the seventh viz Cesar Franck, Richard Strauss and Wagner. Technically, Scriabin was a great innovator. He began writing music in the style of the late Romantic period and gradually

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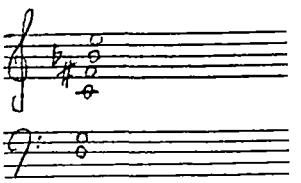
1. p123 Faubion Bowers, Scriabin Volume II

moved away to a highly individualistic style far removed from conventional tonality. His harmonic system was based upon interlocking tritones and the use of his 'mystery' chord.

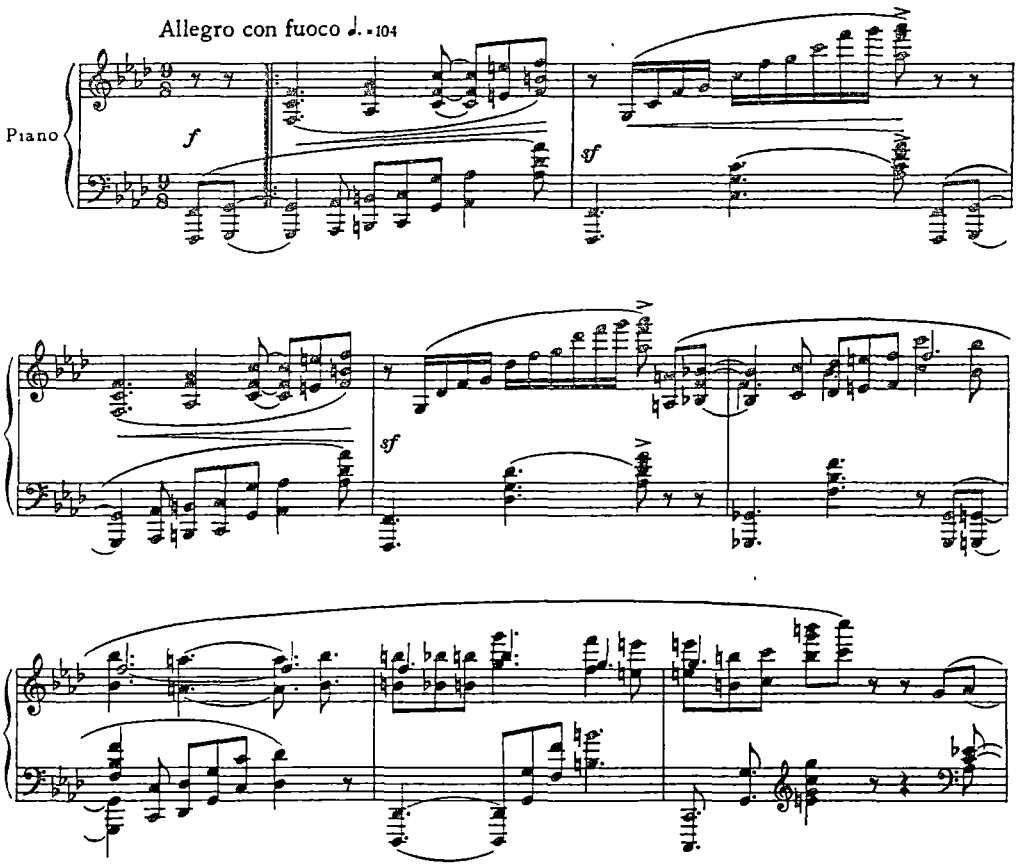


In later life his music became polymodal although all his music after Op.20 was based on his own system. The last works invariably include the major mode, symbolic of youth and bliss although these works are harmonically very complex. His chords comprise more and more notes and it is often very difficult to know which are essential harmony notes.

The Allegro appassionata Op4 was actually the first sonata although only one movement was ever published. Here all the future developments can be seen in embryo. His choice of E^{b} minor was a typically late nineteenth century desire for remoteness. The few compositions he wrote in C major are curiously self-conscious and awkward. Distant G^{b} (or $F^{\#}$) was for him the 'norm'.

9/8 time signature and the use of rolling triplets is a device he used again and again. It facilitates his exulted writing style and flowing melodies. There are trumpet call motifs and the dotted pause, developed from Chopin and used so often in his music.

The sonata No.1 was written at the beginning of 1892. This volcanic work whose upsurging opening theme resembles the Mannheim skyrocket of a century before, contains numerous indications of what was to follow.



It is a long work and in the tradition of the Grand Sonata. The notebooks of 1891 and 1892 give an interesting account by the composer of the events behind its composition.

"At twenty: Gravest event of my life...Trouble with my hand. Obstacle to my supreme goals - GLORY, FAME. Insurmountable, according to doctors. This was my first real defeat in life. First serious thinking: Beginning of self-analysis. Doubted, however, that I would NEVER recover, but still my darkest hour. First thinking about the value of life, religion, God. Still a strong Faith in Him (Jehovah rather than Christ). I prayed from the bottom of my heart, with fervour, went to church... Cried out against fate, against God. Composed First Sonata with its "Funeral March".[1]

The sonata is in four movements including a funeral march. In many ways it resembles the early piano sonatas of Johannes Brahms both from its structural tautness and its youthful naivety. The frequent octave passages hark back to Liszt and Chopin but the Scriabinesque habit of trying to obscure the bar lines is unmistakably his own. In the later music he almost dispenses with them altogether, creating a liquid, improvisatory quality.

Syncopated rhythms, tied melody notes and ametrical accents help to weaken the four-squareness of so much of the music of that time. The defiant modulation to the dominant in bar eight, landing on a curiously unexpected appoggiatura helps to maintain the quaver flow through the rests. The time signature 9/8 is one of the composer's favourites and is perfectly suited to the galloping abandon of such subjects. Scriabin's propensity for building themes out of repeated units of usually no more than a bar is here clearly evident. The accompanying figure in the

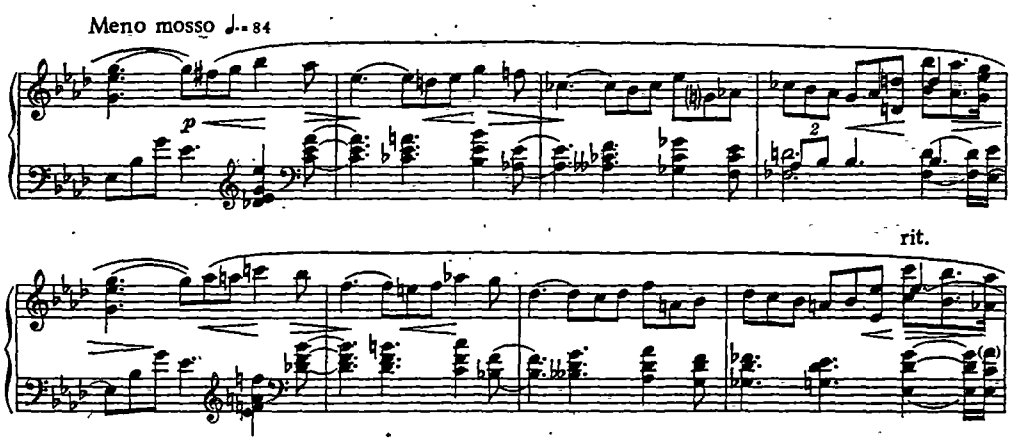
1. Hugh Macdonald, Scriabin (London: O.U.P., 1978)

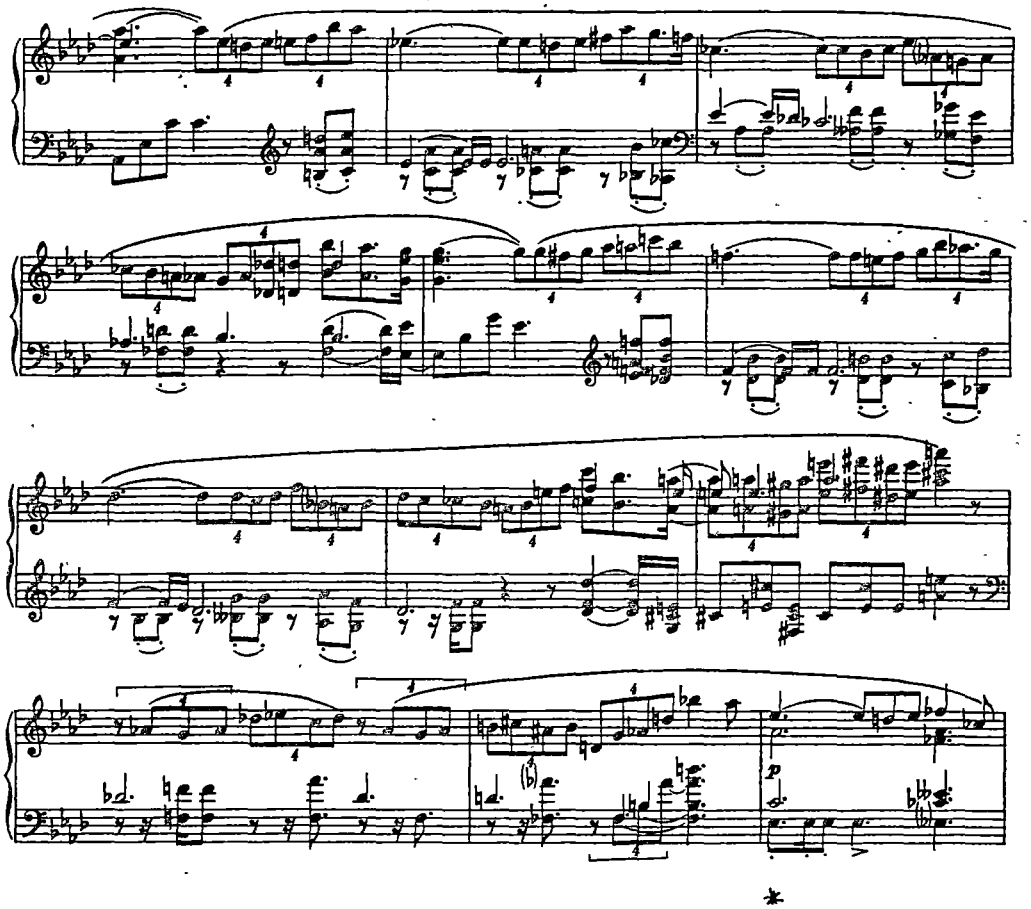
right hand is a copy of the left hand. The second bar is already a simplified version of the first bar unit and is repeated no less than eight times.

The effect of the first subject is achieved largely through its rising tonality and its dramatic passing through the Neapolitan, ending on top C in the eighth bar. Scriabin then develops this theme in rhapsodic fashion with frequent Lisztian modulations to the tonic major (bar ten). Again we see his attempt to obfuscate the bar lines (bars nine and ten) where the startling modulations to the major take place suddenly on the last quaver of the bar and are then tied over into the next bar. The rhythm is tripped and the luminescence of the major is able to shine unhindered.

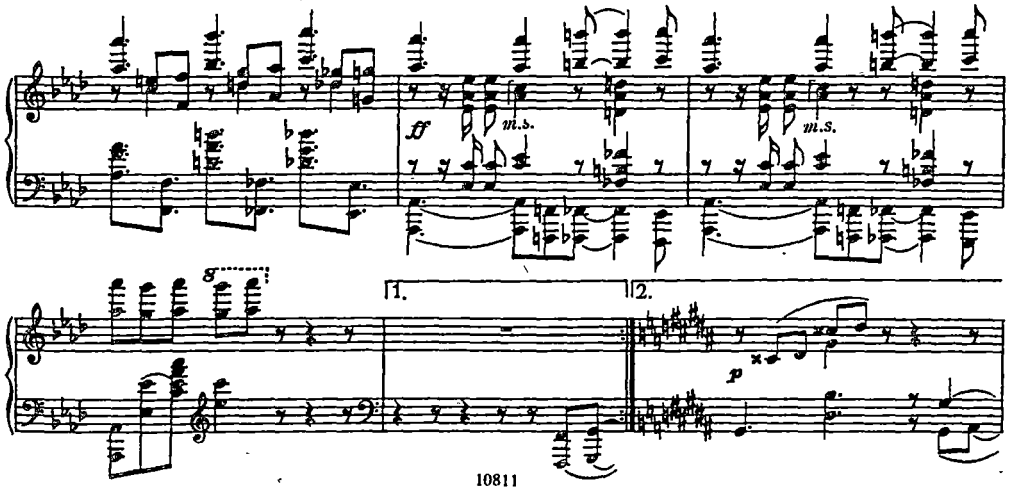
Where the first subject rose, the second subject falls in major thirds, beginning at the section marked Meno mosso. It too is a meandering repetition of a one-bar unit and is in the key of the relative major, A♭.

Scriabin's technique of melodic variation developed from Chopin and John Field and is used to such great effect in the F# major Piano Concerto Op.20. It is clearly visible in the chromatic embroidery of the section following the second subject of the Sonata No.1.





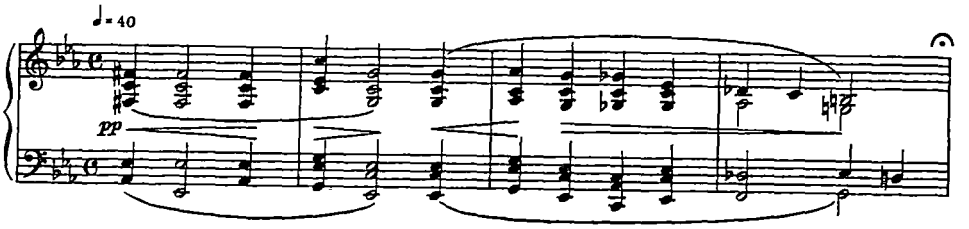
Rachmaninoff used this device frequently but rarely with the consummate elegance of Scriabin. The trumpet call in dotted rhythm, introduced so inconsequentially in the bridge to the second subject, is used as a third subject.* It is the basis of the dramatic build-up in the development. Again Scriabin throws the listener off balance by syncopating the third beat at the climax and ending once more on the second quaver of the second beat.



The recapitulation follows an extended development section with the second subject in heroic declamatory octaves in F minor. In true romantic tradition the movement ends in the tonic major, marked . This is a long movement and Scriabin soon abandoned this protracted style for the greater plasticity of shorter sections and whole works condensed into single movements.

The second movement is a contemplative intermezzo and is hymn-like in its static chordal opening. Scriabin begins the movement with an Italian sixth chord, repeated three times and curiously unresolved.

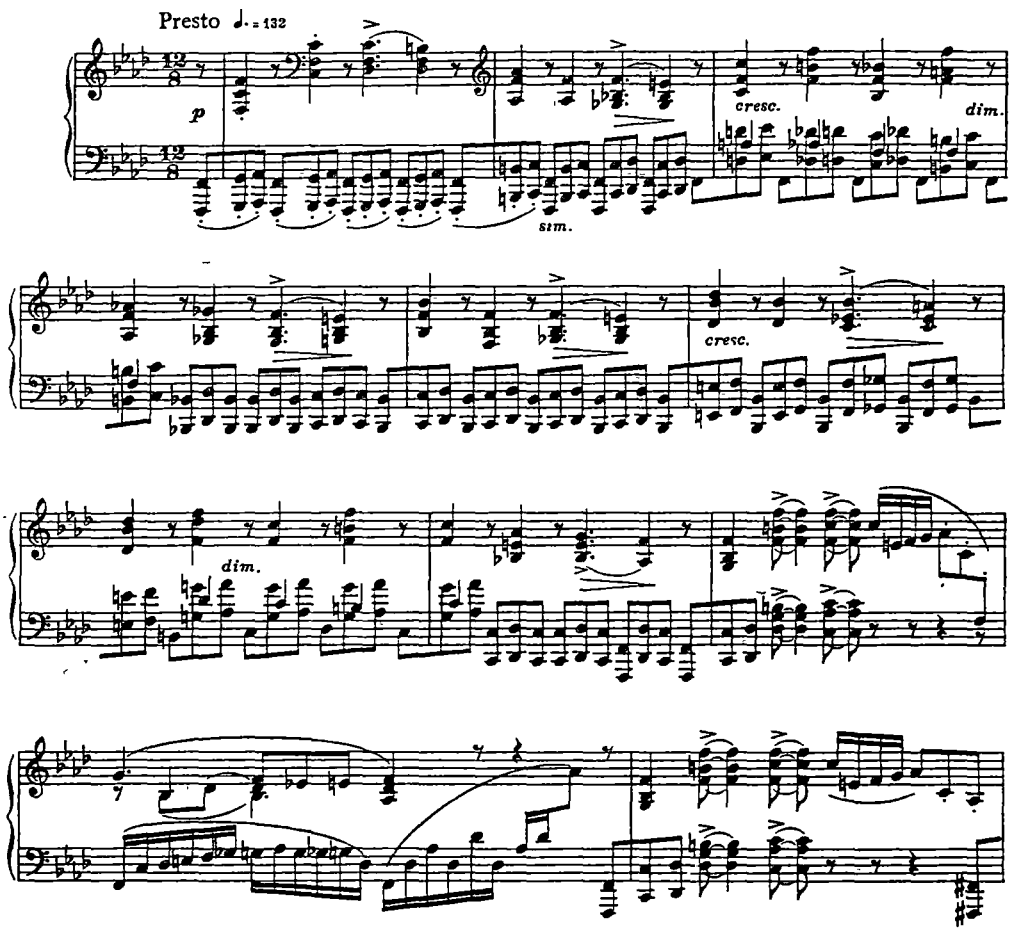
II



A vagueness of feeling is created by almost completely avoiding root position chords. The movement is in C minor but the treatment of the sixth chord and the unresolved Neapolitan in the fourth bar cloud its progression and avoid any strong diatonic tonal sense. The right hand improvises above a repeated bass figure, again passing through the Neapolitan unresolved. The chorale is repeated once more with a throbbing bass obligato interweaving the harmonies.

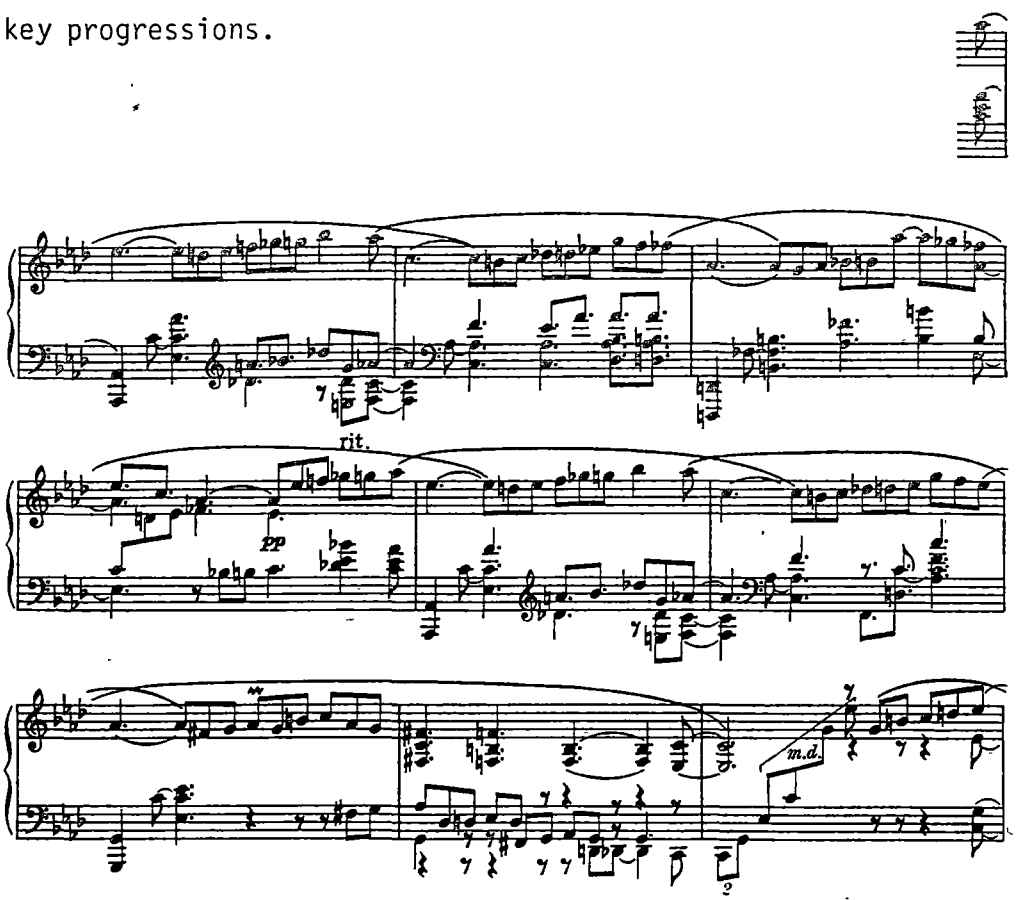
The third movement is marked presto and has a jabbing, incessant octave movement, so beloved by the composer, in the left hand. The notebook described it as a search ending in freedom and the movement is filled with off-beat accents and syncopations.

III



The sudden burst into semiquavers is strongly reminiscent of Rachmaninoff, particularly the third movement of the first piano concerto.

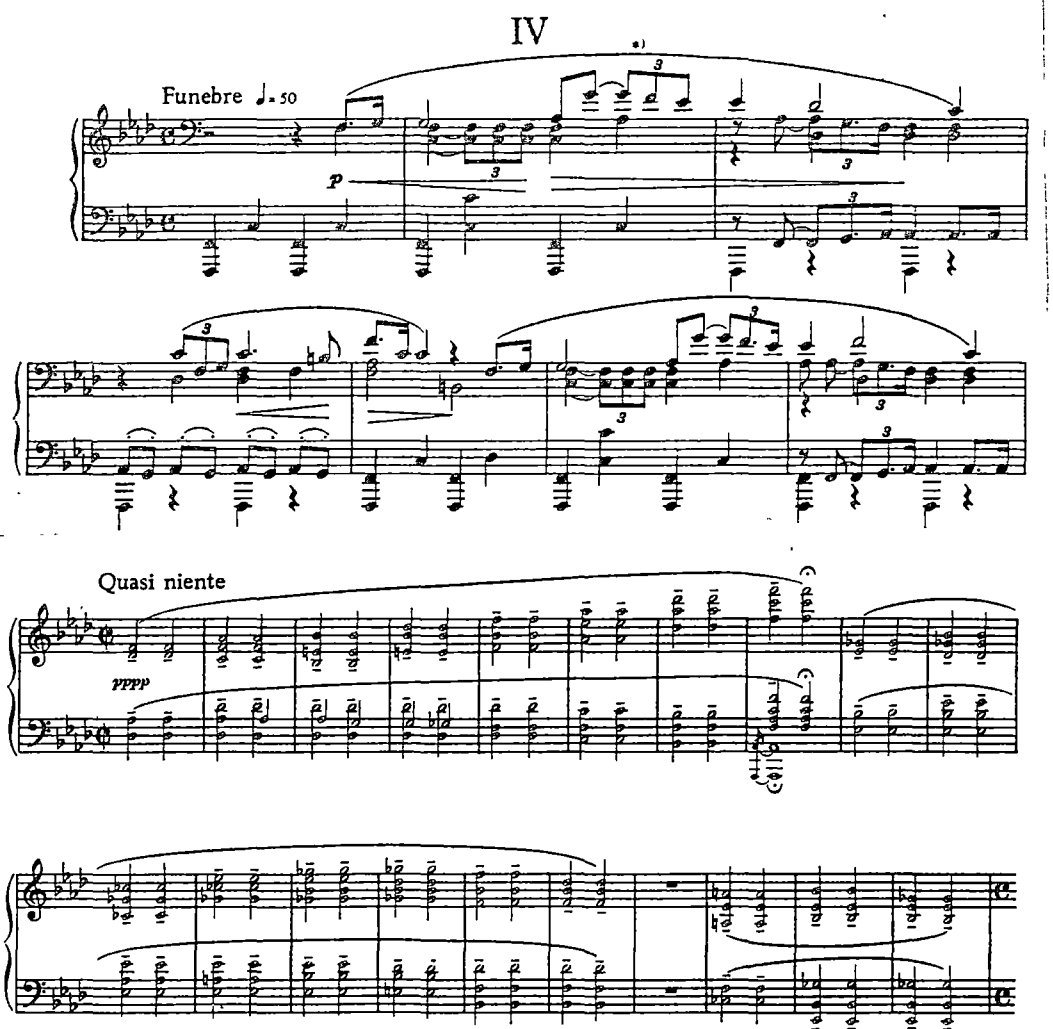
Again the harmony of this movement is coloured with the Neapolitan and the opening theme is repeated almost exactly in the fifth bar but raised in pitch by the interval of a fourth. A lyrical middle section is based on the second subject of the first movement and follows the same key progressions.



The Sturm and Drang of the F minor moto perpetuo returns only to be interrupted abruptly by a brief and tranquil transition to the fourth

movement. The funeral march was written as a tragic eulogy to his damaged right hand and was to represent the attainment of Religion, according to the schematic plan of the notebook.[1]

It is a funeral march in the grandest sense and is complete with drum rolls and sobbing counter-melodies. The middle section marked Quasi niente *pppp* follows the plan of the Chopin Bb minor piano sonata and suggests a heavenly vision before the turgid earthly procession returns.



1. p29 Hugh Macdonald.

The Quasi niente is built on the flattened sixth giving the passage a feeling of remoteness after the plodding tonic pedal of the march section. The procession dies away in the bottom regions of the bass and when it has all but vanished, Scriabin gives a final desperate cry ending on bare fifths.

The second sonata or fantasy-sonata Op.19 was first performed in Paris in May 1896.[1] This restrained and elegant work is far removed from the grandiose first sonata. It is comparatively short and in two movements. Scriabin attached the following programmatic note: "The first section represents the quiet of a southern night on the seashore; the development is the dark agitations of the deep, deep sea. The E major middle section shows caressing moonlight coming after the first darkness of night. The second movement, presto, represents the vast expanse of ocean stormily agitated."[2]

The first theme heralds the germ-like fluidity of the mature Scriabin. Broken into small units, notes held across bar lines and fermatas all help to confuse what is in reality conventional phrasing in groups of four. We are in the remote but Scriabinesque key of G# minor and the thick chromatic harmony is much more coloured than in the first sonata, written four years previously.

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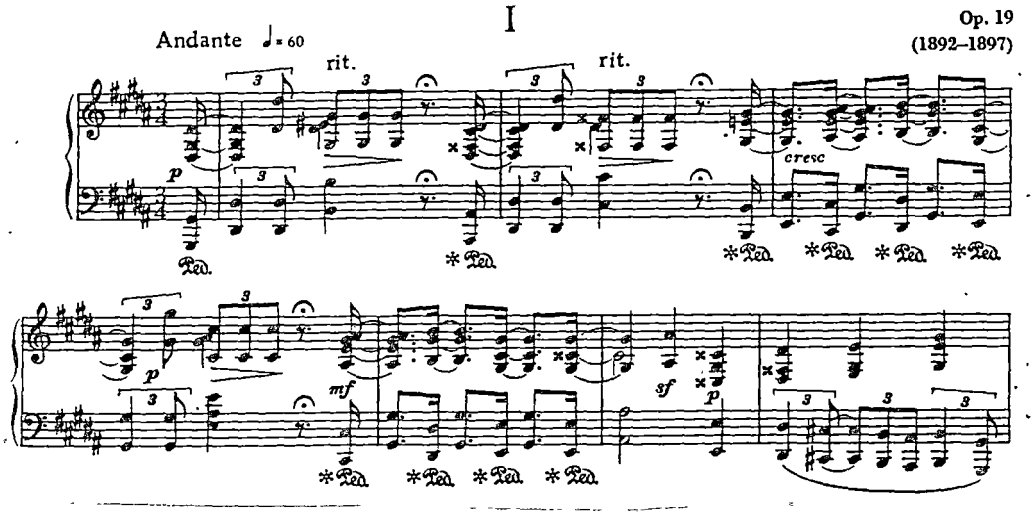
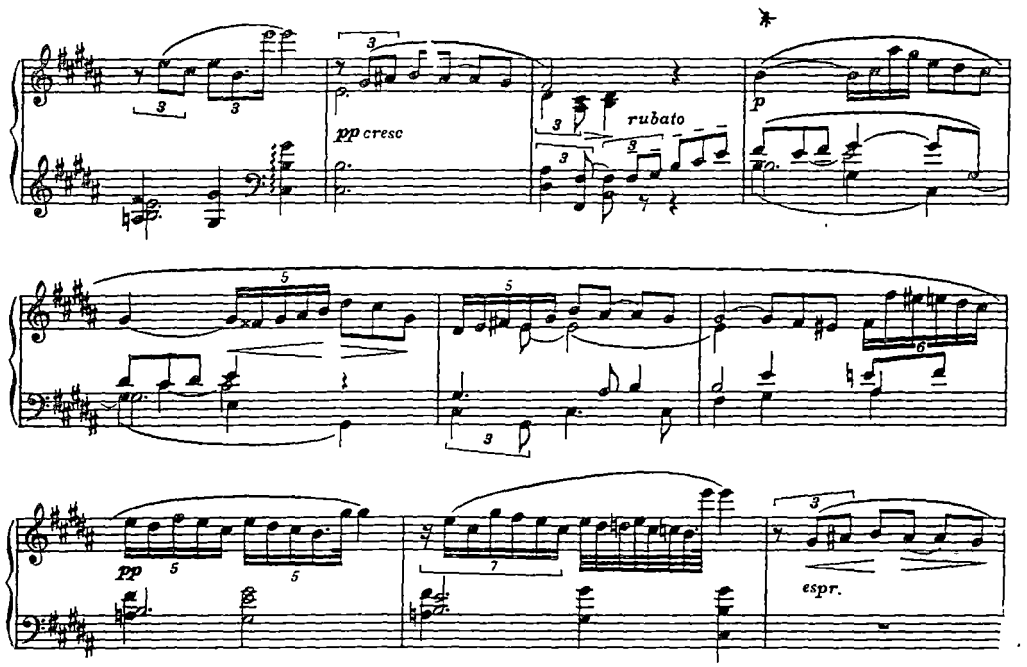
1. p224 Faubion Bowers, Scriabin Volume II (Tokyo, Kodansha Int.Ltd., 1969)

2. p226 ibid.



Scriabin plays with the different motives of the opening with much greater abandon than before. The contrasting theme in the relative B major is obscured behind intricate filigree.



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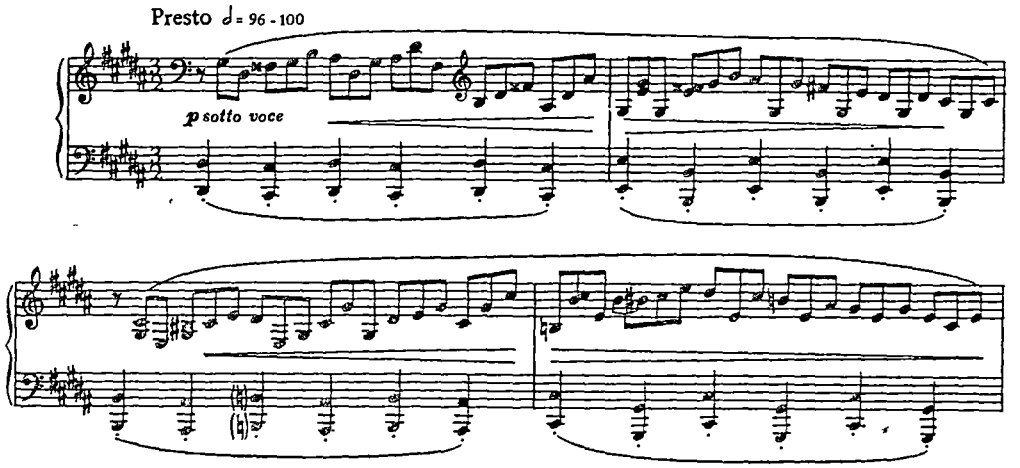
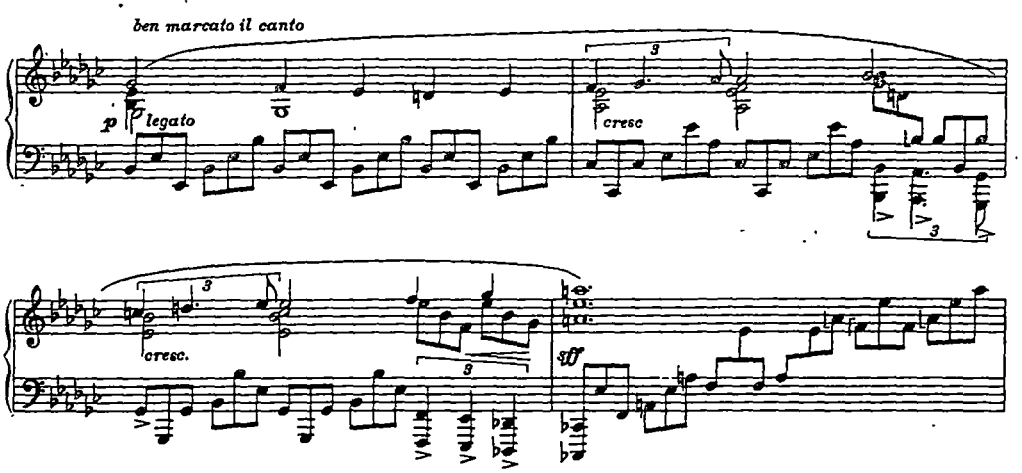
Incessant use of triplets and long flowing melodies abound.

The second movement is a rushing presto.

II



It has a lovely second theme in Eb minor which harks back to the beginning of the first movement.



The third piano sonata was completed in 1898. It is marked Drammatico and is in the Scriabinesque key of F# minor. It is a work of major importance and is grand in scale. Scriabin subtitled the movements: Soul States:

Etats d' Ame. The third movement, Andante, contains possibly the finest melody he wrote. He regarded this work very highly and performed it regularly throughout his life. The notebook gives the following programmatic outline.

First movement

The free, untamed Soul plunges passionately into an abyss of suffering and strife.

Second Movement

The Soul, weary of suffering, finds illusory and transient respite. It forgets itself in song, in flowers... But this vitiated and uneasy Soul invariably penetrates the veil of fragrant harmonies and light rhythms.

Third Movement

The Soul floats on a tender and melancholy sea of feeling. Love, sorrow, secret desires, inexpressible thoughts are wraithlike charms.

Fourth Movement

Now the elements unleash themselves. The Soul struggles within their vortex of fury. Suddenly the voice of the Man-God rises up from within the Soul's depths.[1]

The harmonic language of the third sonata is already much more complex than that of the preceding two and the themes are combined with much

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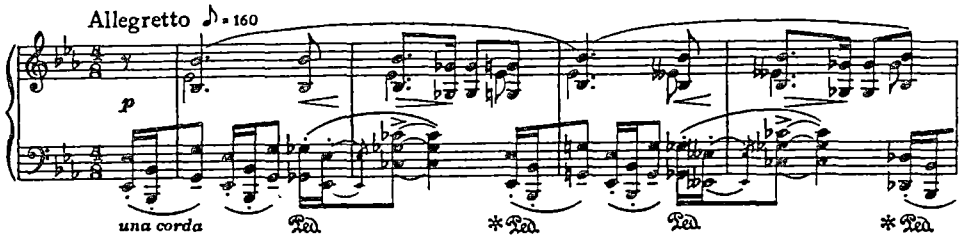
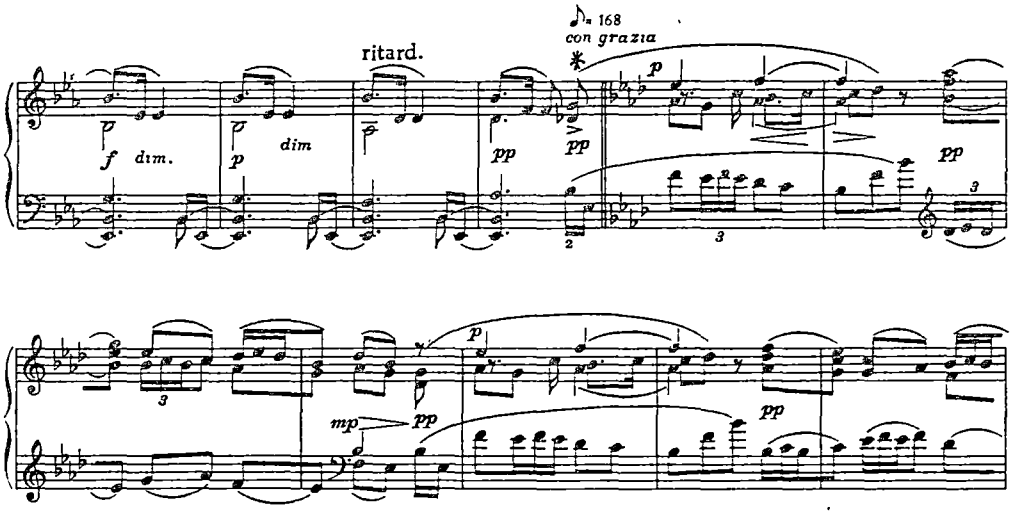
1. p74 Hugh Macdonald, Scriabin (London: O.U.P., 1978)

greater elegance and effect. The second movement has the thrusting bass in octaves so often used by the composer.

II



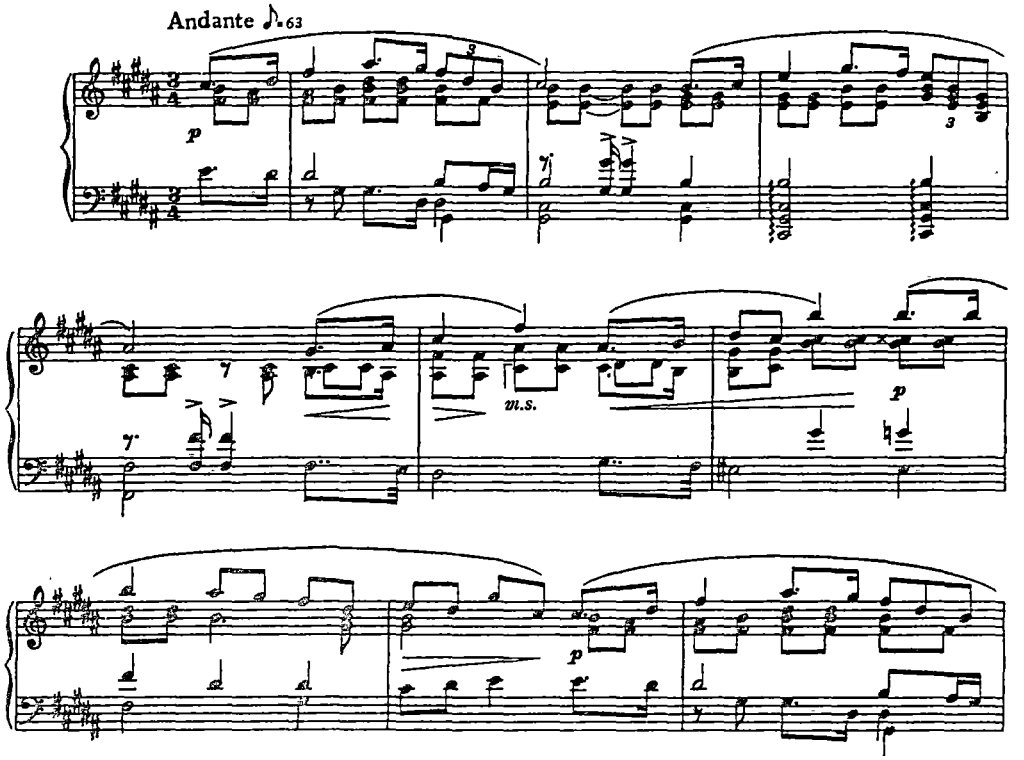
The ethereal trio section is unsurpassable with its liquid triplets and floating melody.



The wonderful melody of the Andante unfolds against a counter-melody in contrary motion to the right hand. Scriabin talked of the stars singing and his own playing of it, particularly the left hand, was described as "ringing silver bells".[1]

1. p213 Faubion Bowers, Scriabin Volume II (Tokyo, Kodansha Int.Ltd., 1969)

III



The variations weave a tapestry of celestial thread around the theme before plunging into the turbulence of the final movement. The fourth movement marked Presto con fuoco recapitulates the themes of the first movement in a magnificent climax with many fugal stretti and a dramatic hammering out of the tonic F# minor.

The fourth sonata, Op.30 was written in 1903 and marks the beginning of his interest in philosophy and theosophy. He also begins using poetic titles such as con voglia, quietissimo, prestissimo, volando. Tanyev wrote:

"You are the first composer who, instead of indicating the tempos, writes praise of his compositions."[1]

It is in the familiar home territory of F# major and is built out of major thirds and perfect fourths. At this stage he preferred the possibilities major tonalities gave him and wrote in the note book, "Minor keys must disappear from music, because art must be a festival. Minor is a whine. I can't stand whining. Tragedy is not in the minor key; minor is abnormal; minor is undertone. I deal in overtones."[2]

This in part explains why the orchestral pieces have never achieved the popularity of the piano works. His use of the colouring effects of overtones, so effective on the piano, are largely impossible with orchestral instruments. Very often a blurred indistinctness results and not the shimmering incandescence he achieved with the piano. The pedal's ability to mix harmonies and bewitch the listener cannot be recreated with the orchestra. Likewise the intimate personal nature of his compositions are far more suited to a solo instrument than to the dullness of voices together.

The sonata marks a departure from the 'Grand Sonata' idea of its predecessors. It is nominally in two movements but could easily be one, so homogenous is the writing.

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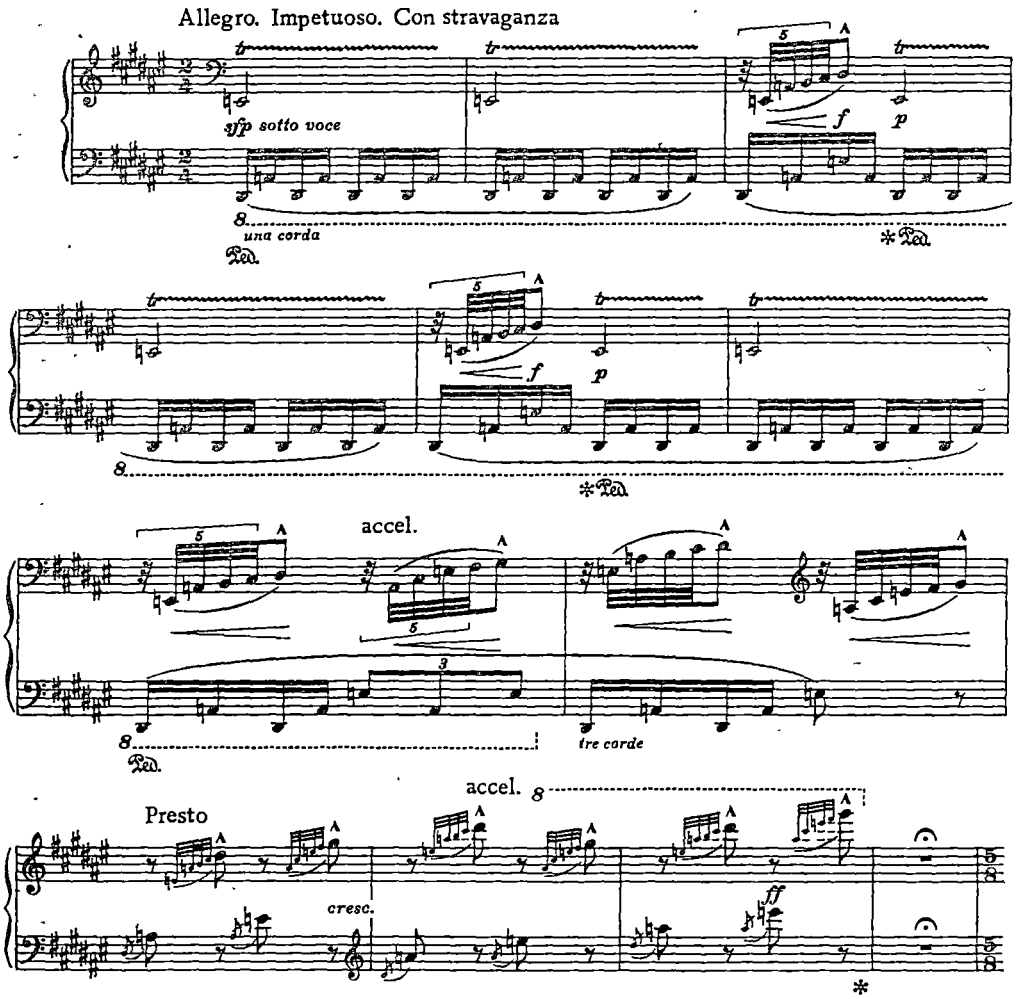
1. p33 Hugh Macdonald, Scriabin (London: O.U.P., 1978)
2. p35 ibid.

In December 1907 the volcanic fifth sonata was written down in just six days. It followed the Poem of Ecstasy and it is similarly exultant in feeling.

The work begins with a pulsating ostinato tritone in the bass and a trill on the flattened 7th in the right hand. The tonic is curiously avoided. The ostinato comes to life and mercurially vanishes into the upper regions of the piano.



Immediately the listener is plunged into the limpid languido section abounding in sevenths and ninths. It is meditative and explores all

sorts of harmonic colourations leading into the joyful Presto con allegrezza.

The work abounds with fanciful instructions to the performer "quasi trombe imperioso, sotto voce misterioso affannato, presto tumultuoso esaltato".

Trills become more frequent and the themes become more compacted. This sonata is boundless in energy and the most extroverted of all he wrote. It is cyclical and ends the way it began after the terrifying climax marked vertiginosa con furia estatico. Scriabin was intensely moved by this composition, so much so that he saw his own role in jotting it down as mere translation. The inspiration came from a higher, heavenly source. The notebook describes the movements.

First movement

Intuition of the whole, the act of synthesis, harmonious unity.

Second movement

Act of analysis, the breaking down of the vision seen by the intuition.

Third movement

Reconstruction, creation of a new whole, harmonisation on another plane.[1]

Beginning a work away from the tonic became more common in the later works. The Enigma Op. 52 No. 2 ended away from the tonic as well.

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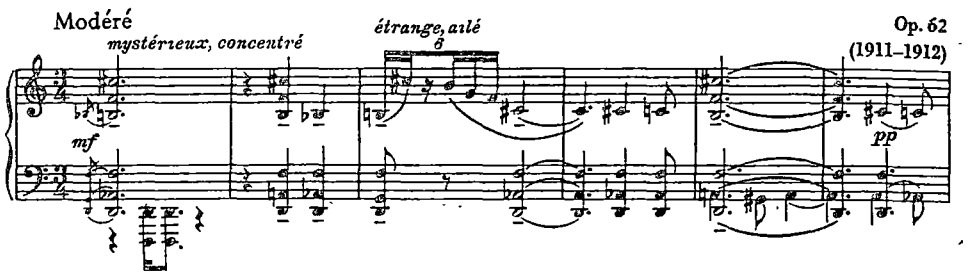
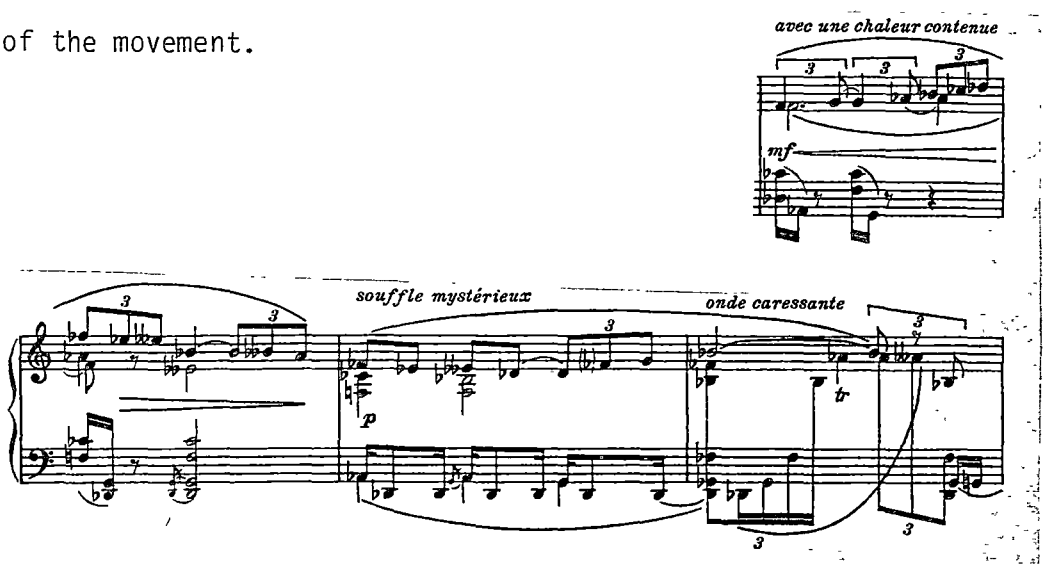
1. Hugh Macdonald, Scriabin (London: O.U.P., 1978)

The tritone plays an increasingly important role in the formation of chords. The Satanic Poem, where the devil mocks a pair of lovers with his exultant power to destroy, is likewise based on the tritone.

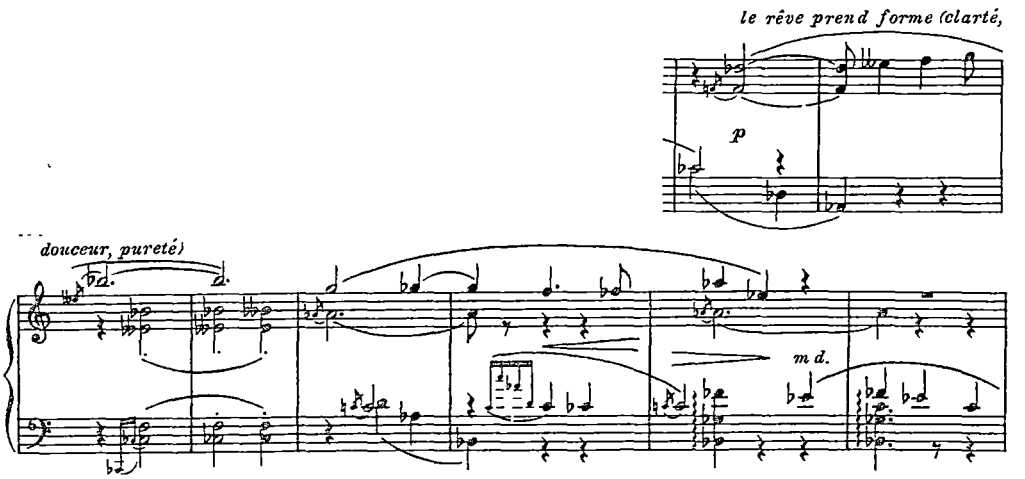
The sixth sonata, completed in 1911 is a brooding and angular work. It is the most dissonant of the ten sonatas and the harmony is built out of perfect and augmented fourths. It so terrified the composer that he never performed it and he is known to have dissuaded students from playing it. It is notated without a key signature and is extremely chromatic. The declamatory opening subject acts rather like the prologue in Greek Tragedy. The rising and falling semitone adds disquiet to the repeated chords which are curiously unresolved.



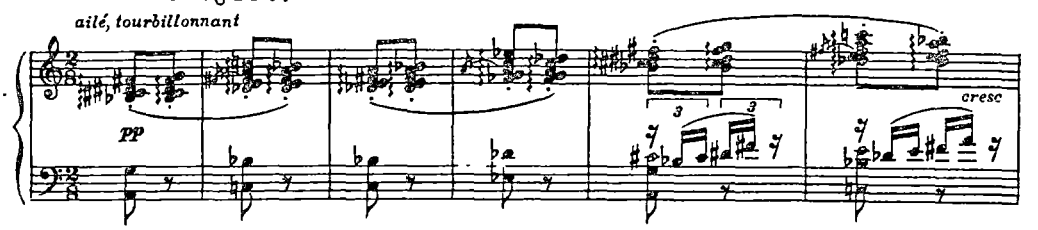
Out of these chords flows the central theme of the movement, a rising and falling scale. It is used for the triumphant climax in the middle of the movement.



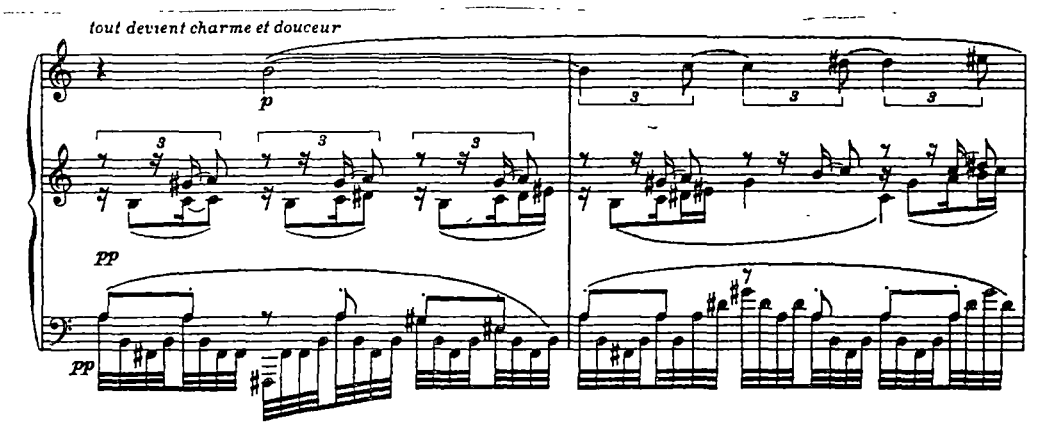
This theme harks back to the funeral march of the first sonata. The second subject at bar 39 presents a heavenly vision after the gloom and foreboding of the first.



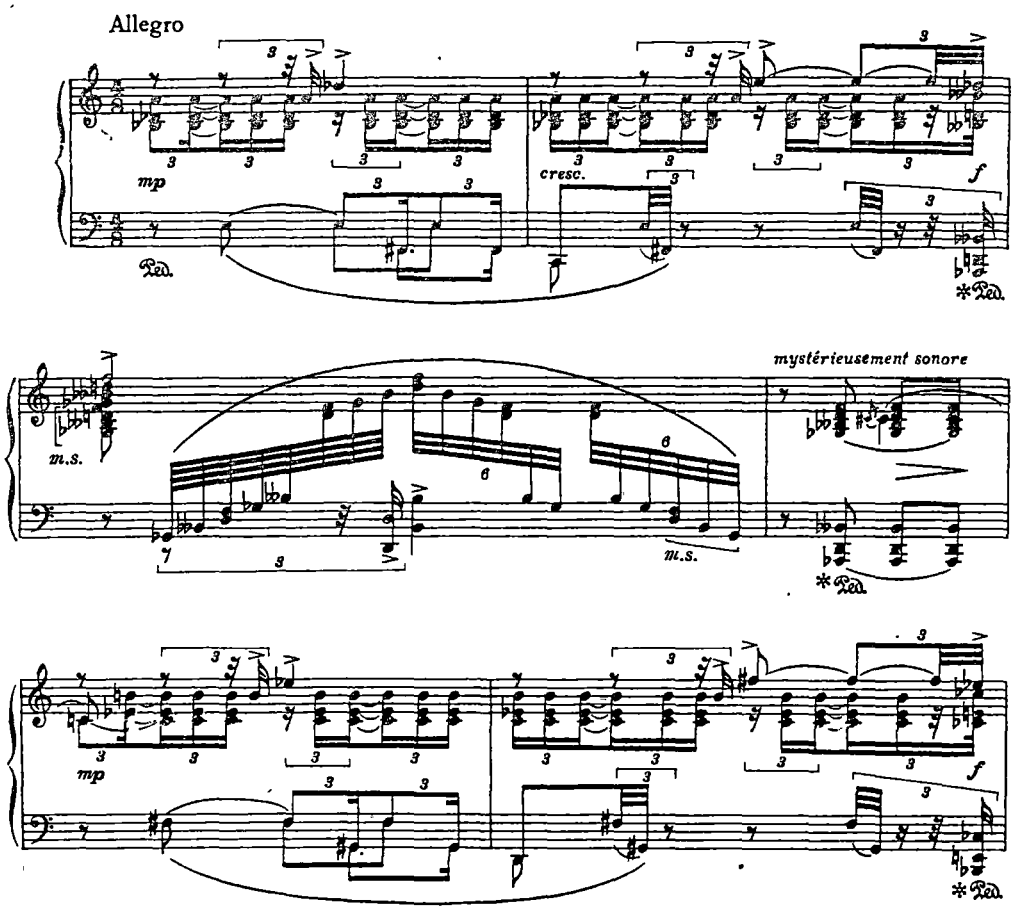
The purity of this section is shattered by a frenetic dance-like section, the third subject.



While the themes differ markedly from one another a sense of pervasive evil is never far away. Even the tranquility of the dreamlike section towards the end of the piece does not alleviate the gloom. Notated on three staves for four voices and accompaniment it is the multi-personae Scriabin speaking and is technically almost unplayable.

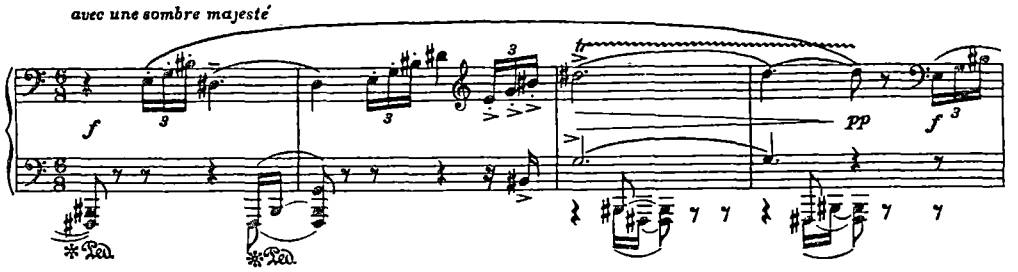


The seventh sonata was also composed in 1911 at Beattenberg, Switzerland, and was actually completed before the sixth. It was Scriabin's favourite and acted for him to appease the horrors and clashing dissonances of the sixth. He performed it regularly until his death and considered it his best. Parts of it are even marked tres pur. He described the opening theme to Sabaneef "Perfumes, like clouds, are here... already this music approximates the Mysterium ... listen to this quiet joy."[1]

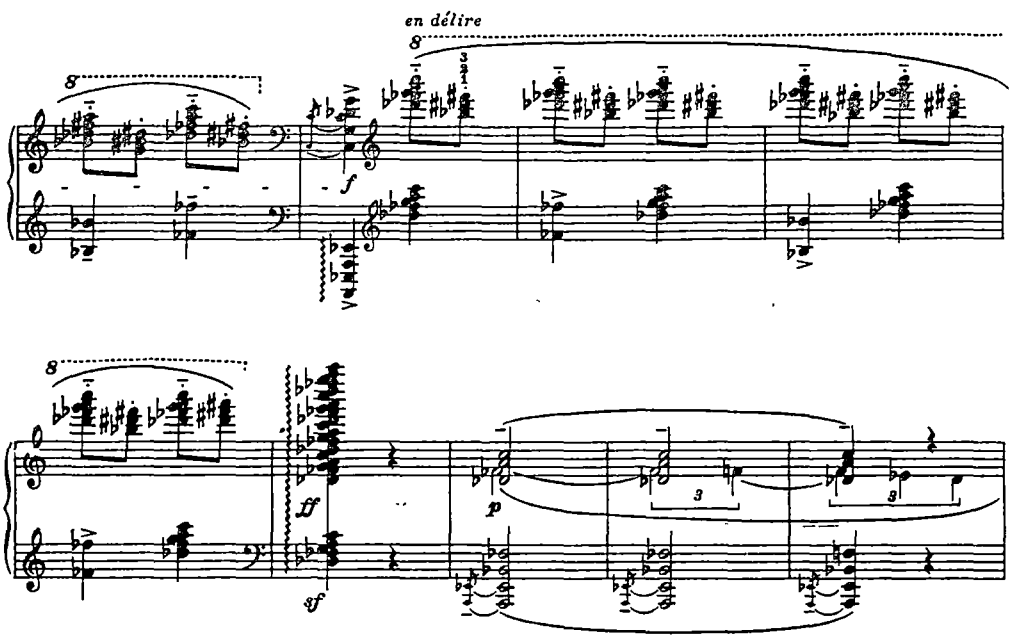


1. p231 Faubion Bowers, Scriabin Volume II (Tokyo, Kodansha Int.Ltd., 1969)

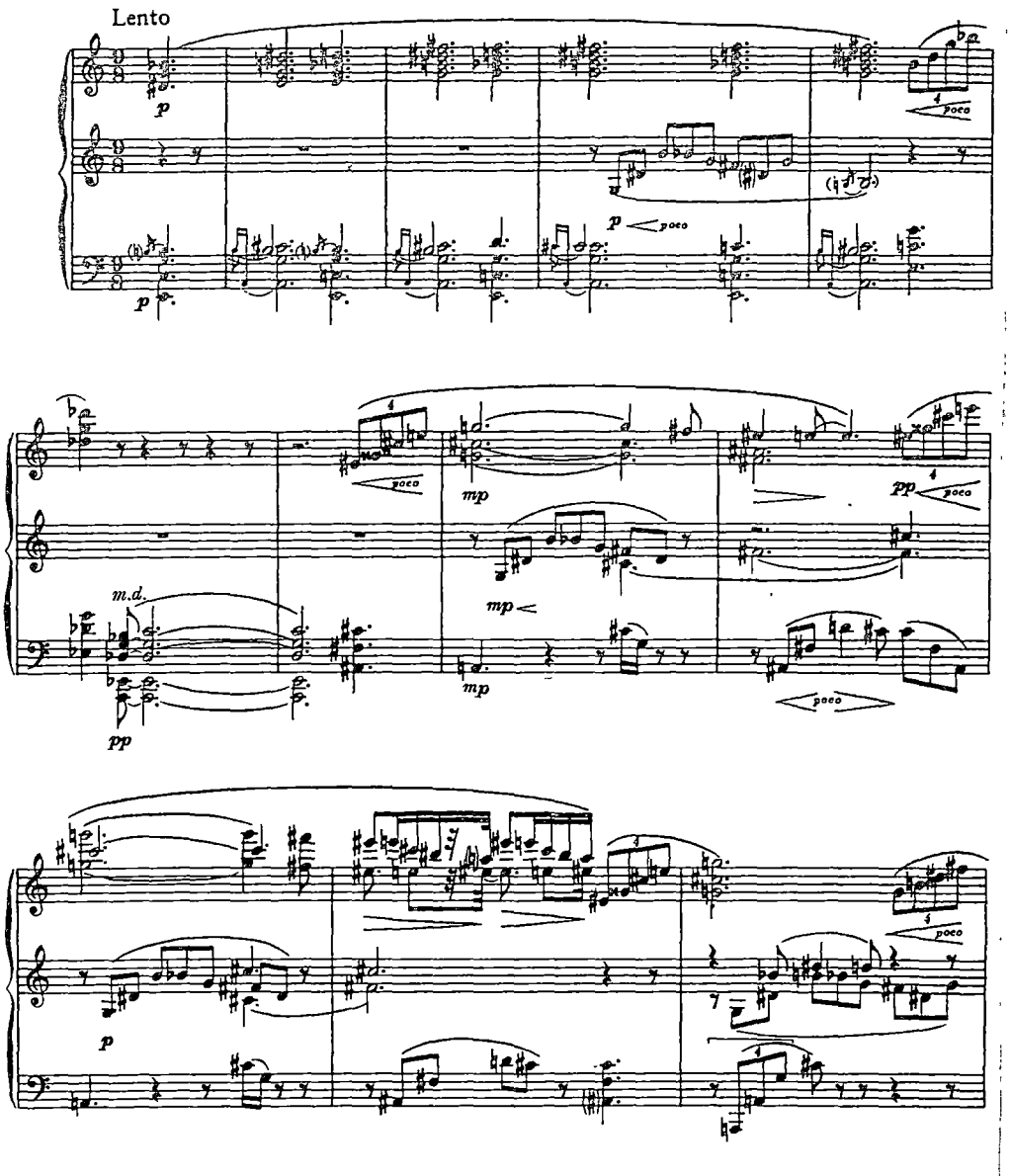
A second horn-like theme appears at bar 17.



This leads to the beautiful and limpid second subject marked avec une celeste volupte which is similar to the second subject in the sixth sonata. le reve prend forme (already quoted) a typically Scriabinesque counter melody in the left hand accompanies the theme in the right. The sonata ends with a delirious bell theme which the composer described as real vertigo.

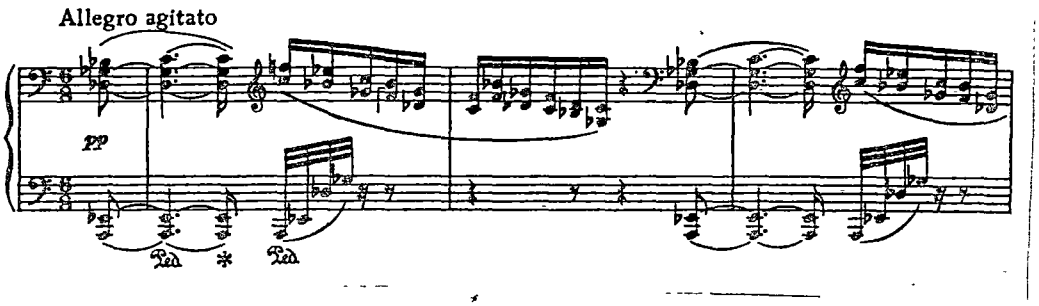


Of the final three sonatas, all composed in 1913, the eighth is the longest and least concise. Structurally it looks back to the early sonatas and the brevity common to the later works is not apparent. The themes are long and the harmony less dissonant. It contains references to Prometheus and Scriabin regarded it very highly. He described the falling figure in bar 3 as "the most tragic episode of my creative work."[1]

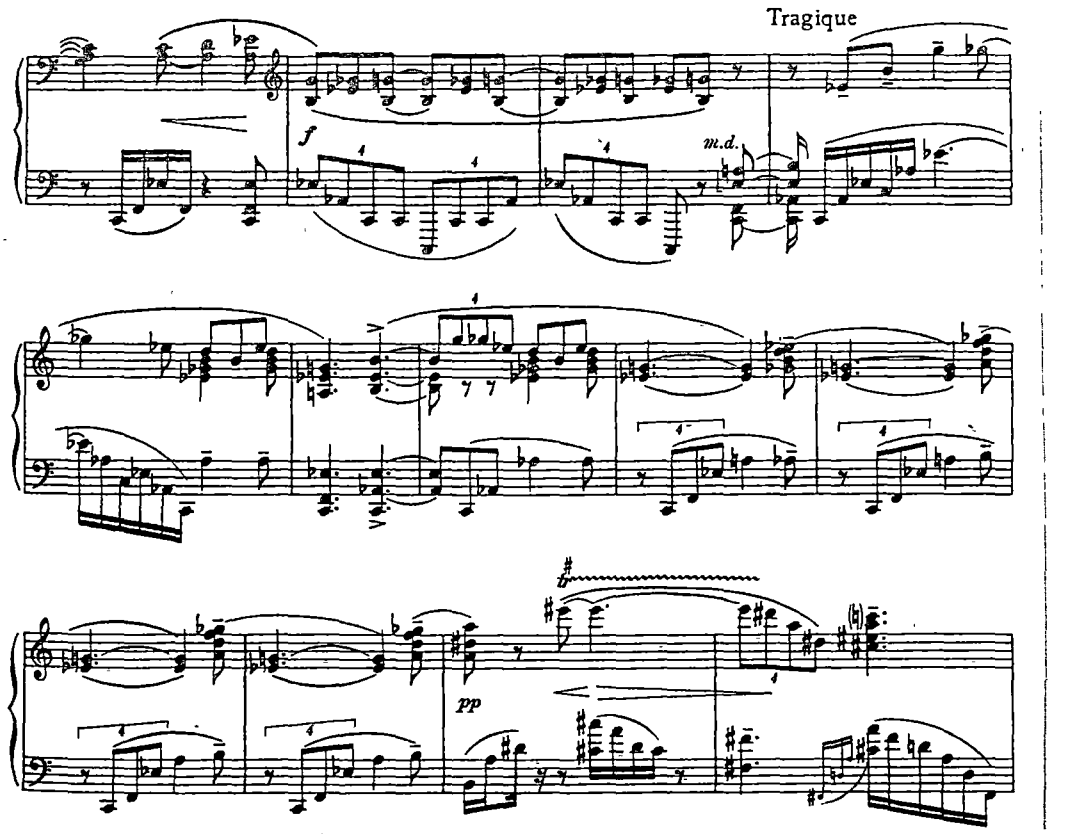


1. p63 Hugh Macdonald, Skryabin (London: O.U.P., 1978)

The opening subject based on a sequence of chords, acts as an introduction and was meant to represent the five elements. The bass chords indicate Earth, the treble Air, the 'tragic' figure at bar 3 Fire, the rising arpeggio in bar 4 Water, and the animated figure of bar 10 Aether. Sonata form begins properly at the Allegro agitato section of bar 22.

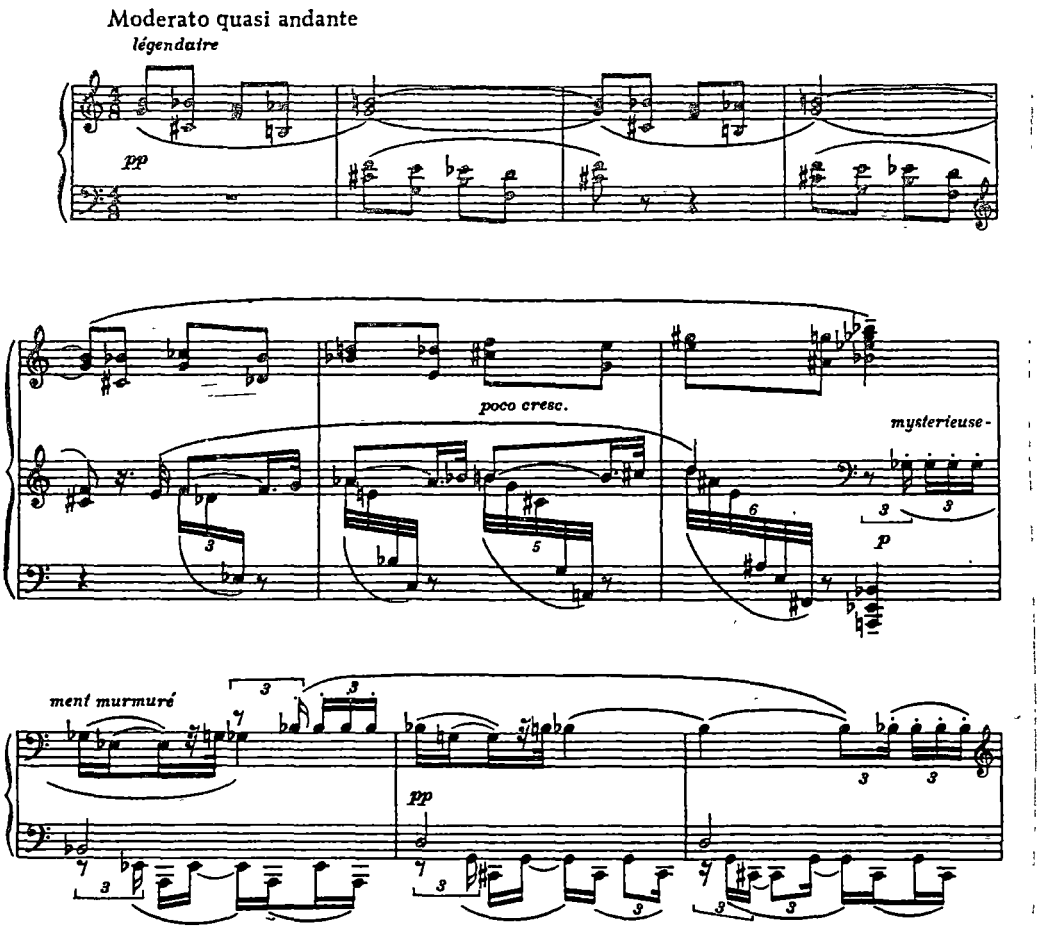


A second subject appears at the section marked Tragique.

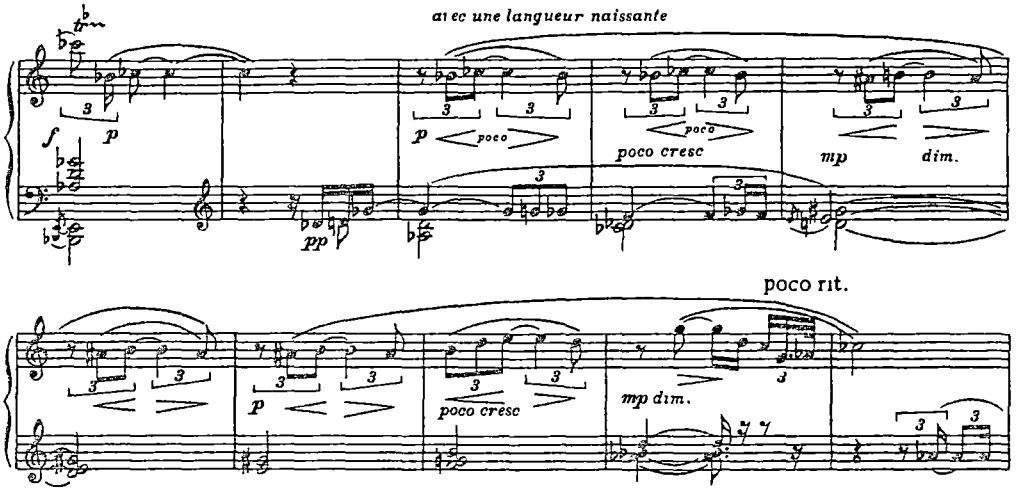


The development section is considerably extended, as is the recapitulation.

The ninth sonata is regarded by many as the finest of the piano sonatas. It is extremely lucid in form with two subject groups, a development and recapitulation. Harmonically the work pulsates between keys and the Leitmotiv idea of bar 7 both unifies and energises this composition. In character it harks back to the demons of the sixth and Scriabin's friend, Alexei Podgaetsky called it the Black Mass. The opening theme provides a mist through which the Mephistophelean Leitmotiv dances (bar 7).

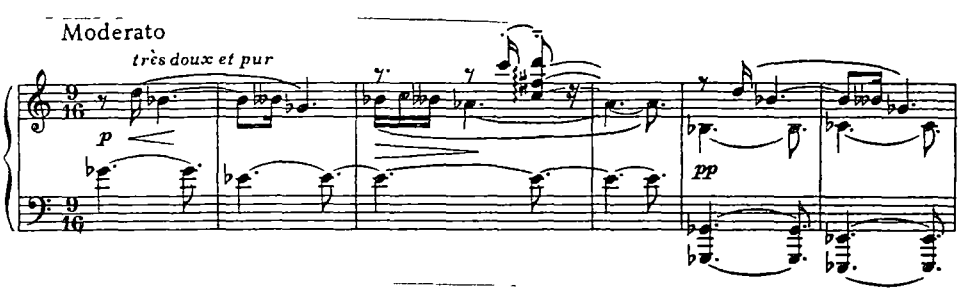


The second subject consists of a mournful minor second repeated five times before rising and then falling back into itself.



The movement becomes more volatile with increasing tempo indications reaching hysteria at the presto section twelve bars before the end. The piece concludes as it began with the falling figure of theme 1.

The tenth sonata was described by the composer as one of insects. "Insects are born from the sun... they are the sun's kisses... How unified world-understanding is when you look at things this way."[1] It has been called the trill sonata and resembles Beethoven's Op.111. They both abound in heavenly trills.



Where there was darkness in the ninth, here all is light. The improvisatory prologue extends to bar 39 where the sonata proper begins.

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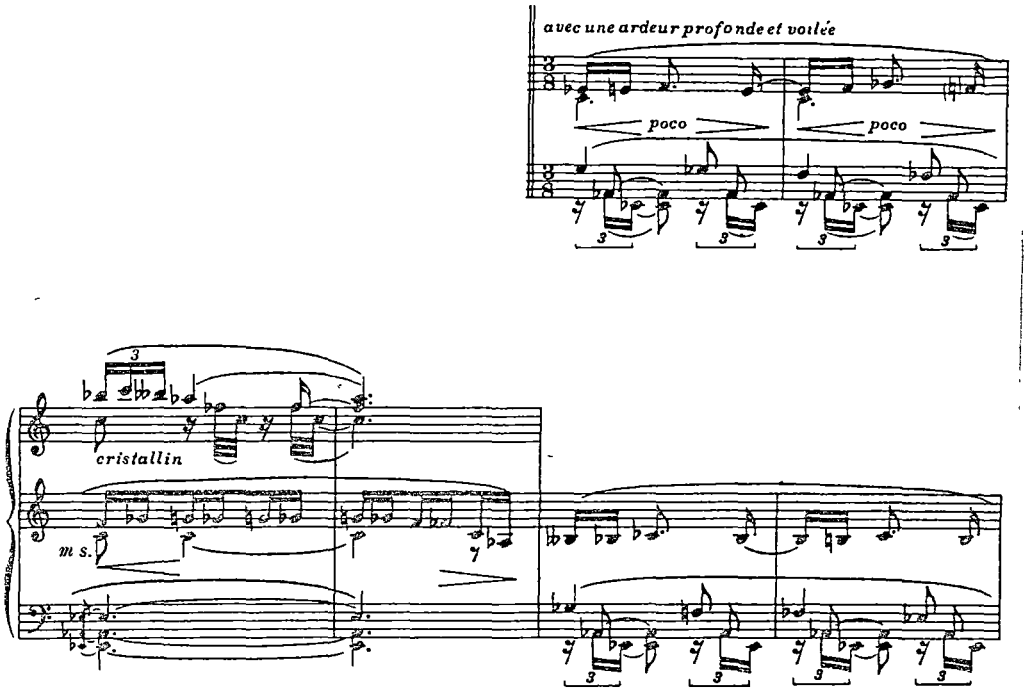
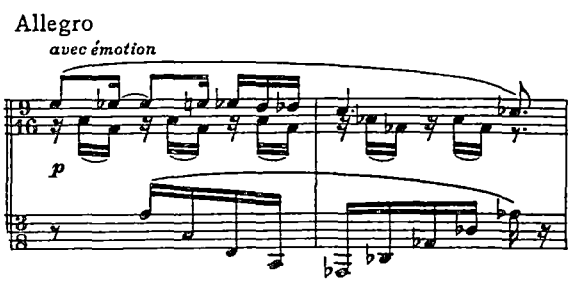
1. p44 Claus Billing, Reclam Introduction to Piano Music, 1967

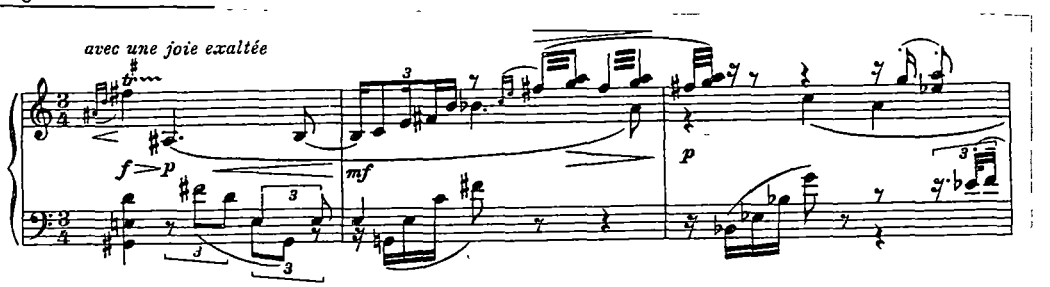
A second theme in the prologue marked avec une ardeur profonde et voilee is introduced at bar 9.



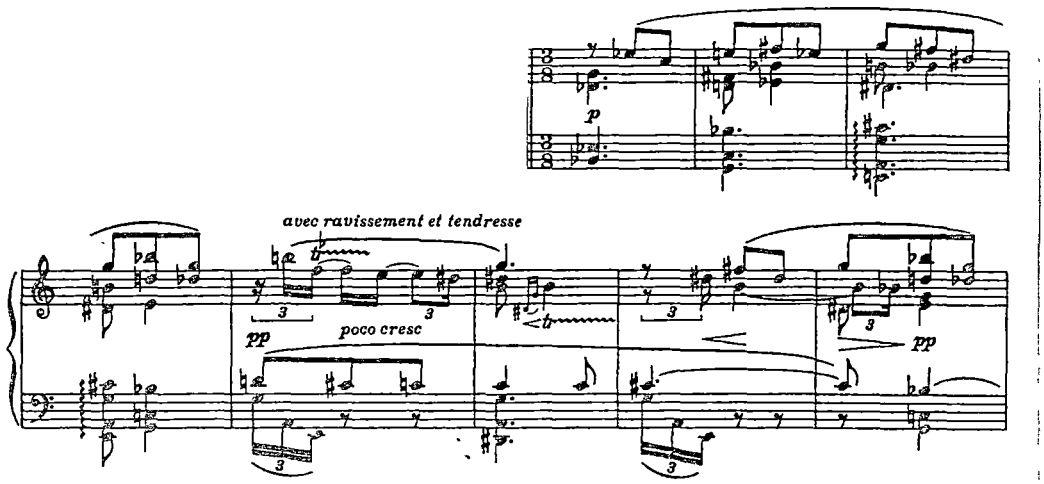
The section marked Allegro contains two main subjects. The first is a downward rushing chromatic figure -



The second subject is heralded in by trills at the section marked avec une joie exaltee.



Part of the second subject contains this wonderful chord sequence.



The score is littered with fanciful directions to the performer such as avec ravissement, fremissant, aile, avec elan lumineux. The development builds to a frantic climax of trills and the opening theme concludes the movement with a curious plagal cadence in the bass.

CONCLUSION

Scriabin was born on Christmas day 1871 and he died at Easter, 1915. A mystic with strongly theosophical leanings, he used these dates as further proof of his Messianic role. He was regarded in his lifetime as an ultra-modernist and compared to Richard Strauss or his contemporary, Sergei Rachmaninoff, he probably was. However, most of what he wrote was based on strict sonata form borrowed directly from Beethoven.

Much of the confusion surrounding him resulted not from his music but from his lifestyle and philosophical polemics. That is not to say his music is not original or indeed revolutionary, but it stops short of severing completely the link with tonality or of abandoning melody in the traditional sense. It could be argued that his development of a harmonic system was far more imaginative than the Second Viennese School's academic application of serial composition and all its permutations but in the end the test is surely what comes out of a composition rather than the vocabulary or compositional devices used.

No other composer so singlemindedly followed his own vision, excepting possibly Beethoven, towards a density of expression and a compression of forms. Each composition marks a progression from its preceding work and there is a clear line of development from work to work which would presumably have culminated in the much talked about but never completed Mysterium. His compositions became shorter and more ethereal. Trills abound, harmonies flutter and volatile arpeggios cover the entire register of the piano and orchestra. The search for brevity mirrored

a concentration of emotion which many of the works achieved.

Numerous composers have been influenced by Scriabin's music. In his own country Scriabin affected the music of Prokofiev, Stravinsky, Medtner, Blumenfeld and Alexandrov. Elsewhere his influence can be traced in the works of Szymanowski, Messiaen, Cyril Scott and York Bowen. The ten sonatas were written over a period of nearly thirty years from 1886 to 1913, two years before his death. The first and last works differ enormously, rather like the paintings of Pablo Picasso. The first sonata hardly appears a relative of the tenth. For many years Scriabin was thought of as a composer of loose and formless pieces. This attitude was brought about by loose and formless performances of his music. Structure was always integral to Scriabin. His language never relied on the overworked orientalisms found in Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev or Liapunov. One is reminded again of Picasso who said: "Others seek, I find."

Much of this essay has attempted to identify the forces and influences at work upon him during his lifetime and how he responded to them, both artistically and through his personality. From the closeted hothouse of his adoring aunts in his youth to his emergence as a composer of international renown he remained curiously aloof from those around him. While he embodies to a large degree the spirit of nineteenth century intellectual Russia, his music is very much a product of his own self-absorption and indifference to contemporary compositional developments.

Even the early piano pieces which are said to resemble Chopin, contain the unmistakable colour and melancholy of what is essentially Scriabin. His vision within himself increased with the years as did the concentration of his harmonic language evolving into the Russian orchard of European music.

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CATALOGUE OF WORKS

Op 1 Waltz F minor

Op 2 3 Pieces

1 Etude $C^{\#}$ minor

2 Prelude B major

3 Imprompt C major

Op 3 10 Mazurkas

1 B minor

2 $F^{\#}$ minor

3 G minor

4 E major

5 $D^{\#}$ minor

6 $C^{\#}$ minor

7 E minor

8 B^{b} minor

9 $G^{\#}$ minor

10 E^{b} minor

Op 4 Allegro appassionata E^{b} minor

Op 5 2 Nocturnes

1 $F^{\#}$ minor

2 A major

Op 6 Sonata No. 1 F minor

Op 7 2 Impromptus a la Mozart

1 $G^{\#}$ minor

2 $F^{\#}$ minor

Op 8 12 Etudes

1 $C^{\#}$ major

2 $F^{\#}$ minor

3 B minor

4 B major

5 E major

6 A major

7 B^{b} minor

8 A^{b} major

9 $C^{\#}$ minor

10 D^{b} major

11 B^{b} minor

12 $D^{\#}$ minor

Op 9 2 Pieces for left hand

1 Prelude $C^{\#}$ minor

2 Nocturne D^{b} major

Op 10 2 Impromptus

1 $F^{\#}$ minor

2 A major

Op 11 24 Preludes

1 C major

2 A minor

3 G major

4 E minor

5 D major

6 B minor

7 A major

8 $F^{\#}$ minor

9 E major

10 $C^{\#}$ minor

11 B major

12 $G^{\#}$ minor

13 G^{b} major

14 E^{b} minor

15 D^{b} major

16 B^{b} minor

17 A^{b} major

18 F minor

19 E^{b} major

20 C minor

21 B^{b} major

22 G minor

23 F major

24 D minor

Op 12 2 Impromptus

1 $F^{\#}$ major

2 B^{b} minor

Op 13 6 Preludes

1 C major

2 A minor

3 G major

4 E minor

5 D major

6 B minor

Op 14 2 Impromptus

1 B major

2 $F^{\#}$ minor

Op 15 5 Preludes

1 A major

2 $F^{\#}$ minor

3 E major

4 E major

5 $C^{\#}$ minor

Op 16 5 Preludes

1 B major

2 $G^{\#}$ minor

3 G^{b} major

4 E^{b} minor

5 $F^{\#}$ major

Op 17 7 Preludes

1 D minor

2 E^{b} major

3 D^{b} major

4 B^{b} minor

5 F minor

6 B^{b} major

7 G minor

Op 18 Allegro de concert, B^{b} minor

Op 19 Sonata No.2 (Sonata - Fantasie) $G^{\#}$ minor

Op 20 Concerto for Piano and Orchestra $F^{\#}$ major

Op 21 Polonaise B^{b} minor

Op 22 4 Preludes

1 $G^{\#}$ minor

2 $C^{\#}$ minor

3 B major

4 B minor

Op 23 Sonata No.3 $F^{\#}$ minor

Op 24 Reverie (orchestra)

Op 25 9 Mazurkas

1 F minor

2 C major

3 E minor

4 E major

5 $C^{\#}$ minor

6 $F^{\#}$ major

7 $F^{\#}$ minor

8 B major

9 E^{b} minor

Op 26 Symphony No.1 E major with chorus

Op 27 2 Preludes

1 G minor

2 B major

Op 28 Fantasie B minor

Op 29 Symphony No.2 C minor

Op 30 Sonata No.4 $F^{\#}$ major

Op 31 4 Preludes

1 D^{b} major

2 F minor

3 E^{b} major

4 C major

Op 32 2 Poems

1 $F^{\#}$ major

2 D major

Op 33 4 Preludes

1 E major

2 $F^{\#}$ major

3 C major

4 A^{b} major

Op 34 Tragic Poem B^{b} major

Op 35 3 Preludes

1 D^{b} major

2 B^{b} major

3 C major

Op 36 Satanic Poem C major

Op 37 4 Preludes

1 B^{b} minor

2 $F^{\#}$ major

3 B major

4 G minor

Op 38 Waltz A^{b} major

Op 39 4 Preludes

1 $F^{\#}$ major

2 D major

3 G major

4 A^{b} major

Op 40 2 Mazurkas

1 D^{b} major

2 $F^{\#}$ major

Op 41 Poem D^{b} major

Op 42 8 Etudes

1 D^{b} major

2 $F^{\#}$ minor

3 $F^{\#}$ major

4 $F^{\#}$ major

5 $C^{\#}$ minor

6 D^{b} major

7 F minor

8 E^{b} major

Op 43 Symphony No.3 The Divine Poem

Op 44 2 Poems

1 C major

2 C major

Op 45 3 Pieces

1 Album Leaf E^{b} major

2 Fantastic Poem C major

3 Prelude E^{b} major

Op 46 Scherzo C major

Op 47 Quasi-valse F major

Op 48 4 Preludes

1 $F^{\#}$ major

2 C major

3 D^{b} major

4 C major

Op 49 3 Pieces

1 Etude E^{b} major

2 Prelude F major

3 Reverie C major

Op 51 4 Pieces

1 Fragility E^{b} major

2 Prelude A minor

3 Winged Poem B major

4 Dance of Langour G major

Op 52 3 Pieces

1 Poem C major

2 Enigma

3 Poem of Langour B major

Op 53 Sonata No.5 $F^{\#}$ major

Op 54 Poem of Ecstacy - Orchestra

Op 56 4 Pieces

1 Prelude E major

2 Ironies C major

Op 57 2 Pieces

1 Desire

2 Danced Caress

Op 58 Albumleaf

Op 59 2 Pieces

1 Poem

2 Prelude

Op 60 Prometheus - Poem of Fire - Piano & Orchestra

Op 61 Poeme - Nocturne

Op 62 Sonata No.6 G major

Op 63 2 Poems

1 Mask

2 Strangeness

Op 64 Sonata No.7 White Mass

Op 65 3 Etudes

1 B^b major 9ths

2 C^b major 7ths

3 G major 5ths

Op 66 Sonata No.8

Op 67 2 Preludes

1 Andante

2 Presto

Op 68 Sonata No.9

Op 69 2 Poems

1 Allegretto 3-4

2 Allegretto 6-8

Op 70 Sonata No.10

Op 71 2 Poems

1 Fantastic

2 Dreaming

Op 72 Vers la Flamme

Op 73 2 Dances

1 Garlands

2 Dark Flame

Op	74	5	Preludes
		1	Douloureax, dechirant
		2	Tres lent, contemplatif
		3	Allegro drammatico
		4	Lent, vague, indecis
		5	Fier, belliqueux

Miscellaneous

Romance for Horn (1890)

Variation 2 for String Quartet on a Russian Theme

Romance for Voice (1894)

Fantasy in A minor for 2 Pianos (1889)

Sonata - Fantasy $G^{\#}$ minor (1886)

Canon D minor (1883)

Valse D^{b} major (1886)